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THE WHITE CHIEF.

A ROMANCE OF NORTHERN MEXICO.

BY CAPTAIN MAYNE REID,

AUTHOR OF "THE HEADLESS HORSEMAN," "THE DEATH-SHOT," "THE SCALP HUNTERS," ETC., ETC.



IN A MOMENT ALL WAS OVER. THE TERRIFIED MUSTANGS HAD SPRUNG OVER THE CLIFF.

Popular Edition of Captain Mayne Reid's Works

The White Chief

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CHAPTER I.

It is the day of San Juan. A broad grassy plain lies just outside the town of San Ildefonso, and upon this the citizens are assembled. It is the scene of the festival, and the sports will soon begin.

We have arrived in front of several rows of seats raised above one another. Let us observe who occupy them. At a glance it is apparent they are in possession of the aristocracy of the settlement. And there, too, observed of all, is the lovely Catalina de Cruces, the daughter of Don Ambrosio, the wealthy miner. He will be a lucky fellow who wins the smiles of Catalina, or rather perhaps the good graces of her father—for Don Ambrosio will have much to say in the matter of her marriage. Indeed, it is rumored that that matter is already arranged; and that Captain Roblado, second in command at the Presidio, is the successful suitor. With all his gold lace and gallant strut, Catalina displays no great taste in her choice—but is he her choice? Maybe not.

Vizcarra, the comandante, is on the ground—a tall colonel of forty—laced and plumed like a peacock. There, too, is the third officer—there are but the three—the *teniente*, Garcia by name.

These are young men of all grades in society, and all of them mounted—of course each in the best way he can. There they go, prancing over the ground, causing their caparisoned steeds to caper and curvet, especially in front of the tiers of seated señoritas.

Nearly a hundred intend to take part in the various trials of skill in equitation.

Let the sports begin!

The first exhibition on the programme was to be the *coleo de toros*, which may be rendered in English as "tailing the bull."

The arrangements having been completed, it was announced by a herald that the *coleo* was about to begin. These arrangements were simple enough, and consisted in collecting the crowd to one side, so that the bull, when let loose, would have a clear track before him in the direction of the open country. Should he not be allowed this favor he might head toward the crowd—a thing to be apprehended.

The competitors were now drawn up in a line. There were a dozen detailed for this first race—young men of all classes, who were, or fancied themselves, "crack" riders. Several dragoons, too, were arrayed with the rest, eager to prove their superiority in the *manège* of the horse.

At a given signal the bull was brought forth from a neighboring corral. His conductors were well-mounted vaqueros, who, with their lazoes around his horns, were ready, in case of his showing symptoms of mutiny, to fling him to the earth by a jerk.

A vicious-looking brute he appeared, with shaggy frontlet and scowling lurid eye. It was plain that it only needed a little goading to make him a still more terrible object; for he already swept his tail angrily against his flanks, tossed his long straight horns in the air, snorted sharply, and beat the turf at intervals with his hoofs. He was evidently one of the fiercest of a fierce race—the race of Spanish bulls.

The bull was led out some two hundred yards beyond the line of horsemen, where he was halted, with his head turned to the open plain. The lazoes, that held him by a leash-knot, were then cautiously slipped, two or three fire-squibs, pointed and barbed, were shot into his hips, and away he went amid the yells of the spectators!

Next moment the riders spurred after, each shouting in his own fashion.

The bull, maddened by the arrowy squibs, and terrified by their hissing, ran at the top of his speed in a nearly direct line. The start he had been allowed was not so easily taken up, even by fast riders, and he had got a full mile or more before any one neared him. Then a dragoon, mounted on a large bay horse, was seen pressing him closely, and at length laying hold of the tail. He was observed to give it a jerk or two, as though endeavoring to fling the brute by sheer strength. It was a failure, however; for the next moment the bull shot out in a side direction, and left his pursuer behind.

A young hacendado, splendidly horsed, was next upon his flanks; but each time he reached forth to grasp the tail it was whisked beyond his reach. He succeeded at length in seizing it; but the bull, making a sudden lurch, whipped his tail from the rider's hands, and left him also in the rear.

One condition of the "coleo" was that each

competitor, after having once failed, should retire from the ground; so that the hacendado and the dragoon were now actually *hors de chasse*.

On went the bull, and after him the eager and excited horsemen. Another dragoon soon tried his "pluck," and also failed; and then a vaquero, and another horseman, and another, with like success—each failure being hailed by a groan from the crowd. There were several tumbles, too, at which the spectators laughed heartily; and one horse was badly gored, having headed the bull and got entangled upon his horns.

In less than ten minutes eleven out of the twelve competitors were seen returning from the chase.

Only one now remained to make his trial. The bull had proved a splendid fellow, and was already in high favor, and loudly applauded by the spectators.

"Bravo, toro! bravissimo!" was heard on all sides.

At the first glance it was plain that the bull had now behind him the handsomest horse and horseman upon the field—would they prove the best? That was to be tried.

The horse was a large, coal-black *mustang*, with a long full tail, pointed at the tip, and carried like the brush of a running fox. Even while in gallop, his neck slightly curved, and his proud figure displayed against the smooth sward, called forth expressions of admiration.

The rider was a young man of twenty or over; and his light, curling hair and white-red complexion distinguished him from all his competitors—who were, without exception, dark-skinned men. He was dressed in full ranchero costume, with its rich brocade and trappings; and instead of the usual "serape," he wore a purple *manga*—a more graceful as well as costlier garment. The long skirts of this he had flung behind him, in order to have his arms free, and its folds, opening to the breeze, added to the gracefulness of his carriage in the saddle.

The sudden appearance of this splendid horseman—for, hanging in the rear with folded *manga*, he seemed not to have been noticed before—caused unusual attention, and many were heard inquiring his name.

"Carlos the cibolero!" cried a voice, loud enough to satisfy all at once.

Some evidently knew who "Carlos the cibolero" was, though by far the greater number on the ground did not. Of the former, one was heard inquiring,—

"Why hasn't he come up before?—He could have done so if he had wished."

"Carrambo! yes," added another. "He might have done so. He only hung back to give the others a trial. He knew none of them could throw that bull. Mira!"

The speaker's conjecture was, no doubt, correct.

It was plain, at first sight, that this rider could easily overtake the bull. His horse was still in a gentle gallop, and, though his ears were set and his red nostrils staring open, it was only through the excitement of the chase, and chafing at being hitherto checked. The bridle-rein was, in fact, still tightly drawn.

As the speaker uttered the cautionary phrase "Mira!" a change was suddenly observed in the manner of the horseman. He was about twenty paces from the chase and directly in the rear. All at once his horse sprang forward at double his former speed, and in a few stretches laid himself alongside the bull. The rider was observed to grasp the long outstretched tail, and then lean forward and downward. The next moment he raised himself with a sudden jerk, and the huge horned creature turned sprawling upon his back. The whole thing seemed to cost him no more effort than if the bull had been a tom-cat. Loud "*vivas*!" broke from the spectators, and the victorious horseman rode back in front of the stand, modestly bowed his thanks, and then retired into the depth of the crowd.

There were not wanting those who fancied that in bowing the eyes of the cibolero were directed on the fair Catalina de Cruces; and some went so far as to assert that she smiled and looked content; but that could not be. The heiress of the rich Don Ambrosio smiled to a compliment from a cibolero!

There was one, however, who *did* smile. That was a fair-haired, fair-skinned girl, who stood upon one of the carretas, by the side of which the victor had placed himself.

The fair girl was the sister of the cibolero.

A strange-looking woman was seated in the bottom of the carreta—an old woman, with long flowing hair, white as flax. She was silent, but her sharp eyes were bent upon the cibolero with a triumphant expression. Some regarded her with curiosity, but most with fear, akin to awe. These knew something of her, and whispered strange tales to one another.

"Esta una bruja!—una hechicera!" (She is a witch! a charmer) said they.

This they muttered in low tones lest they might be heard by Carlos or the girl. She was their mother!

The sports continue. The bull thrown by the cibolero, now cowed, walks moodily across the

plain. He would not serve for a second run, so he is lassoed and run off—to be delivered to the victor as his prize.

A second is brought forth and started, with a fresh dozen of horsemen at his heels.

These seem to be better matched, or rather, the bull has not run off so well, as all overtake him at once, riding past him in their headlong speed. Most unexpectedly the animal turns in his tracks and runs back, heading directly for the stand!

Loud screams are heard from the peblanas in the carretas—from the señoras and señoritas. No wonder. In ten seconds the enraged brute will be in their midst!

The pursuing horsemen are still far behind him. The sudden turning in their headlong race threw them out of distance. Even the foremost of them cannot come up in time.

The other horsemen are all dismounted. No man on foot will dare to check the onward rush of a goaded bull!

Confusion and loud shouting among the men, terror and screaming among the women, are the characteristics of the scene. Lives will be lost—perhaps many. None know but that they themselves will be the victims!

The strings of carretas filled with their terrified occupants flank the stand on each side; but, running further out into the plain, form with it a sort of semicircle. The bull enters this semicircle, and guided by the carretas rushes down, heading directly for the benches, as though determined to break through in that direction. The ladies have risen to their feet, and, half-frantic, seem as though they would leap down upon the very horns of the monster they dread. It is a fearful crisis for them.

Just at this moment a man is seen advancing, lazo in hand, in front of the carretas. He is afoot. As soon as he has detached himself from the crowd he spins the lazo round his head, and the noose shooting out, is seen to settle itself over the horns of the bull.

Without losing a moment, the man runs to a small tree that stands near the center of the semicircle, and hastily coils the other end of the lazo around its trunk. Another moment and he would have been too late.

The knot is scarcely tied when a heavy pluck announces that the bull has reached the end of his rope, and the foiled brute is now seen thrown back upon his hips, with the lazo tightly noosed over his horns. He has fallen at the very feet of the spectators!

"Bravo! viva!" cried a hundred voices, as soon as their owners had sufficiently recovered from their terror to call out.

"Viva! Viva! Carlos the cibolero!"

It was he who had performed this second feat of skill and daring.

The bull was not yet conquered, however. He was only confined within a certain range—the circle of the lazo—and, rising to his feet, with a furious roar he rushed forward at the crowd. Fortunately the lazo was not long enough to enable him to reach the spectators on either side; and again he tumbled back upon his haunches. There was a scattering on all sides, as it was feared he might still slip the noose; but the horseman had now come up. Fresh lazoes were wound about his neck, others tripped up his legs, and he was at length flung violently upon the ground and his quarters well stretched.

He was now completely conquered, and would run no more; and as but two bulls had been provided for the occasion, the "coleo de toros" was for that day at an end.

The Comandante Vizcarra now stepped forth and commanded silence. Placing a Spanish dollar upon the smooth turf, he called out—

"This is to the man who can take it up at the first trial. Five gold onzas that Sergeant Gomez will perform the feat!"

There was silence for a while. Five gold "onzas" (doubloons) was a large sum of money. Only a "rico" could afford to lose such a sum.

After a pause, however, there came a reply. A young ranchero stepped forth:

"Colonel Vizcarra," said he, "I will not bet that Sergeant Gomez cannot perform the feat; but I'll wager there's another on the ground can do as well as he. Double the amount if you please."

"Name your man!" said Vizcarra.

"Carlos the cibolero."

"Enough—I accept your wager. Any one else may have their trial," continued Vizcarra, addressing the crowd. "I shall replace the dollar whenever it is taken up—only one attempt, remember!"

Several made the attempt and failed. Some touched the coin, and even drew it from its position, but no one succeeded in lifting it.

At length a dragoon mounted on a large bay appeared in the list, who was recognized as the Sergeant Gomez. He was the same that had first come up with the bull, but failed to fling him; and no doubt that failure dwelling still in his thoughts added to the natural gloom of his very fallow face. He was a man of large size, unquestionably a good rider, but he lacked that symmetrical shape that gives promise to sinewy activity.

The feat required little preparation. The sergeant looked to his saddle-girths, disincum-

bered himself of his saber and belts, and then set his steed in motion.

In a few minutes he directed his horse so as to shave past the shining coin, and then, bending down, he tried to seize it. He succeeded in lifting it up from the ground; but, owing to the slight hold he had taken, it dropped from his fingers before he had got it to the height of the stirrup.

A shout, half of applause and half of disapprobation, came from the crowd. Most were disposed to favor him on Vizcarra's account. Not that they loved Colonel Vizcarra, but they feared him, and that made them loyal.

The cibolero now rode forth upon his shining black. All eyes were turned upon him. His handsome face would have won admiration, but for its very fairness. Therein lay a secret prejudice. They knew he was not of their race!

Woman's heart has no prejudice, however; and along that line of dark-eyed "doncellas" more than one pair of eyes were sparkling with admiration for the blonde "Americano," for of such race was Carlos, the cibolero.

The cibolero scarce deigned to make any preparation. He did not even divest himself of his *manga*, but only threw it carelessly back, and left its long skirt trailing over the hips of his horse.

Obedient to the voice of his rider, the animal sprang into a gallop; and then, guided by the touch of the knees, he commenced circling round the plain, increasing his speed as he went.

Having gained a wide reach, the rider directed his horse toward the glittering coin. When nearly over it he bent down from the saddle, caught the piece in his fingers, flung it up into the air, and then, suddenly checking his horse underneath, permitted it to drop into his outstretched palm!

All this was done with the ease and habitude of a Hindoo juggler. Even the prejudice could not restrain their applause; and loud *vivas* for "Carlos the cibolero" again pealed upon the air.

The sergeant was humiliated. He had for a long time been victor in these sports—for Carlos had not been present until this day, or had never before taken part in them. Vizcarra was little better pleased. His favorite humbled—himself the loser of ten golden onzas—no small sum, even to the comandante of a frontier *Presidio*. Moreover, to be glibed by the fair *senoritas* for losing a wager he had himself challenged, and which, no doubt, he felt certain of winning. From that moment Vizcarra liked not "Carlos the cibolero."

The next exhibition consisted in riding at full gallop to the edge of a deep "zequia" which passed near the spot. The object of this was to show the courage and activity of the rider as well as the high training of the steed.

The zequia—the canal used for irrigation—was of such width that a horse could not well leap over it, and deep enough to render it no very pleasant matter for a horseman to get into. It therefore required both skill and daring to accomplish the feat. The animal was to arrive upon the bank of the canal in full run, and to be drawn up suddenly, so that his four feet should rest upon the ground inside a certain line. This line was marked at less than two lengths of himself from the edge of the drain. Of course the bank was quite firm, else the accomplishment of such a feat would have been impossible.

It was observed that Carlos the cibolero took no part in this game. What could be the reason? His friends alleged that he looked upon it as unworthy of him. He had already exhibited a skill in horsemanship of a superior kind, and to take part in this would be seeking a superfluous triumph. Such was in fact the feeling of Carlos.

But the chagrined comandante had other views. Captain Roblado as well—for the latter had seen, or fancied he had seen, a strange expression in the eyes of Catalina at each fresh triumph of the cibolero. The two "militarios" had designs of their own. Base ones they were, and intended for the humiliation of Carlos. Approaching him, they inquired why he had not attempted the last feat.

"I did not think it worth while," answered the cibolero, in a modest tone.

"Ho!" cried Roblado, tauntingly; "my good fellow, you must have other reasons than that. It is not so contemptible a feat to rein up on the edge of that 'zanca.' You fear a ducking, I fancy?"

This was uttered in a tone of banter, loud enough for all to hear; and Captain Roblado wound up his speech with a jeering laugh.

Now, it was just this ducking that the *militarios* wished to see.

Whether the cibolero suspected their object did not appear. His reply does not show. When it was heard, the "zequia" and its muddy water were at once forgotten. A feat of greater interest occupied the attention of the spectators.

CHAPTER II.

CARLOS, seated in his saddle, was silent for a while. He seemed puzzled for a reply. The manner of the two officers, as well as Roblado's

speech, stung him. He replied at length, "Captain Roblado, I have said it is not worth my while to perform what a *muchachito* of ten years old would hardly deem a feat. I would not wrench my horse's mouth for such a pitiful exhibition as running him up on the edge of that harmless gutter; but if—"

"Well, if what?" eagerly inquired Robaldo, taking advantage of the pause, and half suspecting Carlos's design.

"If you feel disposed to risk a doubloon—I am but a poor hunter, and cannot place more—I shall attempt what a *muchachito* of ten years would consider a feat, perhaps."

"And what may that be, *Senor Cibolero*?" asked the officer, sneeringly.

"I will check my horse at full gallop on the brow of yonder cliff!"

"Within two lengths from the brow?"

"Within two lengths—less—the same distance that is traced here on the banks of the zequia!"

The cliff to which Carlos had pointed was part of the bluff that hemmed in the valley. It was a sort of promontory, however, that jutted out from the general line, so as to be a conspicuous object from the plain below. Its brow was of equal height with the rest of the precipice, of which it was a part—a sort of buttress—and the grassy turf that appeared along its edge was but the continuation of the upper plateau. Its front to the valley was vertical, without terrace or ledge, although horizontal seam-traversing its face showed a stratification of lime and sandstone alternating with each other. From the sward upon the valley to the brow above the height was one thousand feet sheer. To gaze up to it was a trial to delicate nerves—to look down put the stoutest to the proof.

Such was the cliff upon whose edge the cibolero proposed to rein up his steed. No wonder the proposal was received with a surprise that caused a momentary silence in the crowd. When that passed, voices were heard exclaiming: "Impossible!" "He is mad!" "Pah! he's joking!" "*Esta burlando los militares!*" (He's mocking the military gents); and suchlike expressions.

Carlos sat playing with his bridle-rein, and waiting for a reply.

He had not long to wait. Vizcarra and Roblado muttered some hasty words between themselves; and then, with an eagerness of manner, Roblado cried out:

"I accept the wager!"

"And I another onza?" added the comandante.

"Senores," said Carlos, with an air of apparent regret, "I am sorry I cannot take both. This doubloon is all I have in the world; and it's not likely I could borrow another just now."

As he said this Carlos regarded the crowd with a smile, but many of these were in no humor for smiling. They were really awed by the terrible fate which they believed awaited the reckless cibolero. A voice, however, answered him:

"Twenty onzas, Carlos, for any other purpose. But I cannot encourage this mad project."

It was the young *ranchero*, his former backer, who spoke.

"Thank you, Don Juan," replied the cibolero. "I know you would lend them. Thank you all the same. Do not fear! I'll win the onza. Ha! ha! ha! I haven't been twenty years in the saddle to be bantered by a *Gachupino*."

"Sir!" thundered Vizcarra and Roblado in a breath, at the same time grasping the hilts of their swords, and frowning in a fierce, threatening manner.

"Oh! gentlemen, don't be offended," said Carlos, half sneeringly. "It only slipped from my tongue. I meant no insult, I assure you."

"Then keep your tongue behind your teeth, my good fellow," threatened Vizcarra. "Another slip of the kind may cost you a fall."

"Thank you, *Senor Comandante*," replied Carlos, still laughing. "Perhaps I'll take your advice."

The only rejoinder uttered by the comandante was a fierce "*Carrajo!*" which Carlos did not notice; for at this moment his sister, having heard of his intention, sprang down from the carreta and came running forward, evidently in great distress.

"Oh, brother Carlos!" she cried, reaching out her arms, and grasping him by the knees, "is it true? Surely it is not true?"

"What, *hermanita*?" (little sister), he asked, with a smile.

"That you—"

She could utter no more, but turned her eyes, and pointed to the cliff.

"Certainly, Rosita, and why not? For shame, girl! Don't be alarmed—there's naught to fear, I assure you—I've done the like before."

"Dear, dear Carlos, I know you are a brave horseman—none braver—but oh! think of the danger—*Dios de mi alma!* think of—"

"Pshaw, sister! don't shame me before the people—come to mother!—hear what she will say. I warrant she won't regard it." And, so saying, the cibolero rode up to the carreta, followed by his sister.

"*Mira! Roblado!*" muttered Colonel Vizcarra to his subordinate and fellow-villain. "See yonder! *Santissima Virgen!* Saint Guadalupe! Look, man! Venus, as I'm a Christian and a soldier! In the name of all the saints, what sky has she fallen from?"

"*Por Dios!* I never saw her before," replied the captain; "she must be the sister of this fellow; yes—hear them! they address each other as brother and sister! She is pretty!"

"*Ay de mi!*" sighed the comandante. "What a rodsend! I was growing dull—very dull of this monotonous frontier life. With this new excitement, perhaps, I may kill another month. Will she last me that long, think you?"

"Scarcely—if she come and go as easily as the rest. What! already tired of Inez?"

"Poh! poh! loved me too much; and that I can't bear. I would rather too little if anything."

"Perhaps this blonde may please you better in that respect. But, see! they are off!"

As Roblado spoke, Carlos and his sister had moved forward to the carreta which held their aged mother, and were soon in conversation with her.

The comandante and his captain, as well as a large number of the spectators, followed, and crowded around to listen.

"She wants to persuade me against it, mother," Carlos was heard to say. "Without your consent, I will not. But hear me, dear mother; I have half pledged myself, and I wish to make good my pledge. It is a *point of honor*, mother."

The last phrase was spoken loudly and emphatically in the ear of the old woman, who appeared to be a little deaf.

"Who wants to dissuade you?" she asked, raising her head, and glancing upon the circle of faces. "Who?"

"Rosita, mother."

"Let Rosita to her loom, and weave rebosos—that's what she's fit for. You, my son, can do greater things—deeds, ay, deeds; else have you not in your veins the blood of your father. He did deeds—he—ba! ba! ba!"

The strange laugh caused the spectators to start, accompanied, as it was, with the wild look of her who uttered it.

"Go!" cried she, tossing back her long flax-colored locks, and waving her arms in the air—"go, Carlos the cibolero, and show the tawny cowards—slaves that they are—what a free American can do. To the cliff! to the cliff!"

As she uttered the awful command, she sunk back into the carreta, and relapsed into her former silence.

Placing his sister once more in the carreta, and giving her a parting embrace, Carlos leaped to the back of his steed, and rode forth upon the plain. When at some distance he reined in, and bent his eyes for a moment upon the tiers of benches where sat the *senoras* and *senoritas* of the town. A commotion could be observed among them. They had heard of the intended feat, and many would have dissuaded the cibolero from the perilous attempt.

There was one whose heart was full to bursting—full as that of Carlos's own sister; and yet she dared not show it to those around. She was constrained to sit in silent agony, and suffer.

Carlos knew this. He drew a white handkerchief from his bosom, and waved it in the air, as though bidding some one adieu. Whether he was answered could not be told; but the next moment he wheeled his horse, and galloped off toward the cliffs.

All who had horses followed the cibolero, who now directed himself toward a path that led from the valley to the table above. This path wound up the cliffs by zigzag turnings, and was the only one by which the upper plain could be reached at that point. A corresponding road traversed the opposite bluff, so that the valley might be here crossed; and this was the only practicable crossing for several miles up and down.

The cibolero, on gaining the ground, pointed out the spot where he had proposed to execute his daring design. From the plain above the cliffs were not visible, and even the great abyss of the valley itself could not be seen a hundred paces back from the edge of the bluff. There was no escarpment or slope of any kind. The turf ran in to the very edge of the precipice, and on the same level with the rest of the plain. It was smooth and firm—covered with a short sward of *gramma* grass. There was neither break nor pebble to endanger the hoof. No accident could arise from that cause.

The spot chosen, as already stated, was a sort of buttress-like promontory that stood out from the line of bluffs. This formation was more conspicuous from below. Viewing it from above, it resembled a tongue-like continuation of the plain.

Carlos first rode out to its extremity, and carefully examined the turf. It was just of the proper firmness to preclude the possibility of a horse's hoof either sliding or sinking into it. He was accompanied by Vizcarra, Roblado, and others. Many approached the spot, but kept at a safe distance from the edge of the horrid steep. Though denizens of this land of grand

geological features, there were many present who dreaded to stand upon the brow of that fearful ledge and look below.

The cibolero sat upon his horse, on its very edge, as calm as if he had been on the banks of the zequia, and directed the marking of the line. His horse showed no symptoms of nervousness. It was evident he was well trained to such situations. Now and then he stretched out his neck, gazed down into the valley, and recognizing some of his kind below, uttered a shrill neigh. Carlos purposely kept him on the cliff, in order to accustom him to it before making the terrible trial.

The line was soon traced, less than two lengths of the horse from the last grass on the turf. Viscarra and Roblado would have insisted upon short measure, but their proposal to curtail it was received with murmurs of disapprobation and mutterings of "Shame!"

What did these men want? Though not evident to the crowd, they certainly desired the death of the cibolero. Both had their reasons. Both hated the man. The cause or causes of their hatred were of late growth—with Roblado still later than his comandante. He had observed something within the hour that had rendered him furious. He had observed the waving of that white kerchief, and as he stood by the stand he had seen to whom the "adios" was addressed. It had filled him with astonishment and indignation; and his language to Carlos had assumed a bullying and brutal tone.

The young ranchero, who had accompanied the party to the upper plain, insisted upon fair play.

"Here, Carlos!" cried he, while the arrangements were progressing; "I see you are bent on this madness, and since I cannot turn you from it, I shall not embarrass you. But you sha'n't risk yourself for such a trifle. My purse! bet what sum you will."

As he said this, he held out a purse to the cibolero, which, from its bulk, evidently contained a large amount.

Carlos regarded the purse for a moment without making answer. He was evidently gratified by the noble offer. His countenance showed that he was deeply touched by the kindness of the youth.

"No," said he, at length; "no, Don Juan. I thank you with all my heart, but I cannot take your purse—one onza, nothing more. I should like to stake one against the comandante."

"As many as you please," urged the ranchero.

"Thank you, Don! only one—that with my own will be two. Two onzas!—that, in faith, is the largest bet I have ever made. *Vaya!* a poor cibolero staking a double onza!"

"Well, then," replied Don Juan, "if you don't, I shall. Colonel Viscarra!" said he aloud, addressing himself to the comandante, "I suppose you would like to win back your wager. Carlos will now take your bet for the onza, and I challenge you to place ten."

"Agreed!" said the comandante, stiffly.

"Dare you double it?" inquired the ranchero.

"Dare I, sir?" echoed the colonel, indignant at being thus challenged in the presence of the spectators. "Quadruple it, if you wish, sir."

"Quadruple then!" retorted the other. "Forty onzas that Carlos performs the feat!"

"Enough! deposit your stakes!"

The golden coins were counted out, and held by one of the bystanders, and judges were appointed.

The arrangements having been completed, the spectators drew back upon the plain and left the cibolero in full possession of the promontory—alone with his horse.

All stood watching him with interested eyes. Every movement was noted.

He first directed his horse at a walk along the cliff, and within a few feet of its edge. This was to strengthen the nerves both of himself and the animal. Presently the walk became a trot, and then a gentle canter. Even this was an exhibition fearful to behold. To those regarding it from below it was a beautiful but terrible spectacle.

After a while he headed back toward the plain, and then stretching into a fair gallop—the gait in which he intended to approach the cliff—he suddenly reined up again, so as to throw his horse nearly on his flanks. Again he resumed the same gallop and again reined up; and this maneuver he repeated at least a dozen times, now with his horse's head turned toward the cliffs, and now in the direction of the plain. Of course this gallop was far from being the full speed of the animal. That was not bargained for. To draw a horse up at race-course speed within two lengths of himself would be an utter impossibility, even by sacrificing the life of the animal. A shot passing through his heart would not check a racer in so short a space. A fair gallop was all that could be expected under the circumstances, and the judges expressed themselves satisfied with that which was exhibited before them. Carlos had put the question.

At length he was seen to turn his horse toward the cliff and take his firmest seat in the saddle. The determined glance of his eyes

showed that the moment had come for the final trial.

A slight touch of the spur set the noble brute in motion, and in another second he was in full gallop, and heading directly for the cliff!

The gaze of all was fixed with intense earnestness upon that reckless horseman. Every heart heaved with emotion; and, beyond their quick breathing, not an utterance escaped from the spectators. The only sounds heard were the hoof-strokes of the horse as they rung back from the hard turf of the plain.

The suspense was of short duration. Twenty strides brought horse and horseman close to the verge, within half a dozen lengths. The rein still hung loose—Carlos dared not tighten it—a touch he knew would bring his horse to a halt, and that before he had crossed the line would only be a failure.

Another leap—another—yet another! Ho! he is inside—Great God! He will be over!

Such exclamations rose from the spectators as they saw the horseman cross the line, still in a gallop; but the next moment a loud cheer broke from both crowds, and the "vivas" of those in the valley were answered by similar shouts from those who witnessed the feat from above.

Just as the horse appeared about to spring over the horrid brink, the reins were observed suddenly to tighten, the fore-hoofs became fixed and spread, and the hips of the noble animal rested upon the plain. He was poised at scarce three feet distance from the edge of the cliff! While in this attitude the horseman raised his right hand, lifted his sombrero, and after waving it round returned it to his head!

The daring feat was ended and over; and hearts but a moment ago throbbing wildly within tender bosoms, now returned to their soft and regular beating.

CHAPTER III.

WHEN the cibolero returned to the plain, he was received with a fresh burst of vivas, and kerchiefs were waved to greet him. One only caught his eye, but that was enough. He saw not the rest, nor cared to see them. That little perfumed piece of cambric, with its lace border, was to him an ensign of hope—a banner that would have beckoned him on to achieve deeds of still higher daring. He saw it held aloft by a small jeweled hand, and waved in triumph for him. He was happy.

He passed the stand, rode up to the carreta, and, dismounting, kissed his mother and sister. He was followed by Don Juan, his backer; and there were those who noticed that the eyes of the blonde were not always upon her brother; there was another on the ground who shared their kind glances, and that other was the young ranchero. No one, not even the dullest, could fail to notice that those kind glances were more than repaid. It was an affair of mutual and understood love, beyond a doubt.

It was a happy little group around the carreta, and there was feasting, too—dulces, and oregat, and wine from El Paso of the best vintage. Don Juan was not afraid to spend money, and he had no reason on that occasion, with fifty onzas of clear gain in his pocket—a fact that by no means sat easily on the mind of the comandante.

The latter was observed, with a clouded countenance, strolling around, occasionally approaching the carreta, and glancing somewhat rudely toward the group. His glances were, in fact, directed on Rosita, and the consciousness of his almost despotic power rendered him careless of concealing his designs. His admiration was expressed in such a manner that many could perceive it. The poor girl's eyes fell timidly when they encountered his, and Don Juan, having noticed it, was not without feelings of anger as well as uneasiness. He knew the character of the comandante, as well as the dangerous power with which he was armed.

The concluding game was at length heralded. It was to be the "*Correr el gallo*" (running the cock). As this is rather an exciting sport, the monte tables and other minor amusements were once more put aside; and all prepared to watch "el gallo."

"Running the cock" is a New Mexican game in all its characteristics. It is easily described. Thus: A cock is suspended by the limbs to a horizontal branch, at just such a height that a mounted man may lay hold of his head and neck hanging downward. The bird is fastened in such a manner that a smart pluck will detach him from the tree; while, to render this the more difficult, both head and neck are well covered with soap. The horsemen must be in full gallop while passing under the branch; and he who succeeds in plucking down the cock is pursued by all the others, who endeavor to rob him of the prize. He has a fixed point to run round, and his goal is the tree from which he started. Sometimes he is overtaken before reaching this, the cock snatched from him—or, as not unfrequently happens, torn to pieces in the contest. Should he succeed in getting back—still retaining the bird entire—he is then declared victor. The scene ends by his laying his prize at the feet of his mistress; and she—usually some pretty poblana—appears that

same evening at the fandango with the feathered trophy under her arm—thus signifying her appreciation of the compliment paid her, as well as giving to the *fandangeros* ocular proof of the fact that some skillful horseman is her admirer. It is a cruel sport, for it must be remembered that the poor cock that undergoes all this plucking and mangling is a *living bird*!

There are two modes of the "*Correr el gallo*." The first has been described. The second only differs from it in the fact that the cock, instead of being tied to a tree, is buried up to his shoulders in the earth. The horsemen, as before, pass in routine—each bending from his saddle, and striving to pluck the bird out of the ground. For the rest the conditions are the same as before.

The first cock was hung to a branch, and the competitors having taken their places in a line, the game commenced.

Several made the attempt, and actually seized the bird's head, but the soap foiled them.

The dragoon sergeant was once more a competitor, but whether his colonel made any further bet upon him is not known.

The sergeant, who, as already stated, had the advantage of a tall figure and a tall horse, was able to get a full grasp at the neck of the bird, and being already provided, as was afterward ascertained, with a fistful of sand, he took the prize with him and galloped off.

But there were swifter horses than his on the ground, and before he could double the turning-post he was overtaken by an active vaquero, and lost a wing of his bird. Another wing was plucked from him by a second pursuer, and he returned to the tree with nothing but a fragment left! Of course he received neither *vivas* nor cheers.

Carlos, the cibolero, took no part in this contest. He knew that he had won glory enough for that day—that he had made both friends and enemies, and he did not desire to swell the list of either. Some of the bystanders, however, began to banter him, wishing, no doubt, to see him again exhibit his fine horsemanship. He withstood this for some time, until two more cocks were plucked from the tree—the vaquero already alluded to carrying one of them clear, and laying it at the feet of his smiling sweetheart.

A new thought seemed now to have entered the mind of Carlos, and he was seen riding into the lists, evidently about to take part in the next race.

"It will be some time before I can be present at another fiesta," remarked he to Don Juan. "Day after to-morrow I start for the plains. So I'll take all the sport I can out of this one."

An innovation was now introduced in the game. The bird was buried in the ground; and its long neck and sharp-pointed bill showed that it was no cock, but a snow-white "*gruya*," one of the beautiful species of herons common in these regions. Its fine tapering neck was not soiled with soap, but left in its natural state. In this case the chances of failure lay in the fact that, loosely buried as it was, the *gruya* would not allow its head to be approached by a hand, but jerked it from side to side, thus rendering it no easy matter to get hold of it.

The signal being given, away went the string of horsemen! Carlos was among the last, but on coming up he saw the white bending neck still there. His hand was too quick for the bird, and the next moment it was dragged from the yielding sand, and flapping its snowy wings over the withers of his horse.

It required not only speed on the part of Carlos, but great adroitness, to pass the crowd of horsemen who now rushed from all points to intercept him. Here he dashed forward, there reined up, anon wheeled round a rider and passed behind him; and, after a dozen such maneuvers, the black horse was seen shooting off toward the turning-post alone. This passed, he galloped back to the goal, and holding up his prize, unstained and intact, received the applause of the spectators.

There was a good deal of guessing and wondering as to who would be the recipient of the trophy. Some girl of his own rank, conjectured the crowd; some poblana or ranchero's daughter. The cibolero did not seem in haste to gratify their curiosity; but, after a few minutes, he astonished them all by flinging the *gruya* into the air and suffering it to fly off. The bird rose majestically upward, and then, drawing in its long neck, was seen winging its way toward the lower end of the valley.

It was observed that before parting with the bird Carlos had plucked from its shoulders the long gossamer-like feathers that distinguish the heron species. These he was tying into a plume.

Having accomplished this, he put spurs to his horse, and, galloping up to the front of the stand, he bent gracefully forward, and deposited the trophy at the feet of *Catalina de Cruces*!

A murmur of surprise ran through the crowd and sharp censure followed fast. What! a cibolero—a poor devil, of whom nothing was known—aspire to the smiles of a rico's daughter? It was not a compliment! It was an insult! Presumption intolerable!

And these critiques were not confined to the señoras and señoritas. The poblanas and rancheras were as bitter as they. These felt themselves slighted—passed by—regularly jilted—by one of their own class. Catalina de Cruces indeed!

Catalina—her situation was pleasant, yet painful—painful, because embarrassing. She smiled, then blushed, uttered a soft "*Gracias, caballero*," yet hesitated a moment whether to take up the trophy. A scowling father had started to his feet on one side, on the other a scowling lover. The last was Roblado.

"Insolent!" cried he, seizing the plume, and flinging it to the earth; "insolent!"

Carlos bent down from his saddle, once more laid hold of the plume, and stuck it under the gold band of his hat. Then, turning a defiant glance upon the officer, he said, "Don't lose your temper, Captain Roblado. A jealous lover makes but an indifferent husband." And transferring his look to Catalina, he added with a smile, and in a changed tone, "*Gracias, señorita*!"

As he said this he doffed his sombrero, and, waving it gracefully, turned his horse and rode off.

The incident had created no small excitement, and a good deal of angry feeling. The cibolero had roused the indignation of the aristocracy, and the jealousy and envy of the democracy; so that, after all his brilliant performances, he was likely to leave the field anything but a favorite. The wild words of his strange old mother had been widely reported, and national hatred was aroused, so that his skill called forth envy instead of admiration. An angel, indeed, should he have been to have won friendship there—he an Americano—a "heretico"—for in this far corner of the earth fanaticism was as fierce as in the Seven-billed City itself during the gloomiest days of the Inquisition!

Mayhap it was as well for Carlos that the sports were now ended, and the fiesta about to close.

In half-an hour the ground was clear, and the lean coyote might be seen skulking over the spot in search of a morsel for his hungry maw.

CHAPTER IV.

THOUGH the field-sports were over, the fiesta of San Juan was not yet ended. There were still many sights to be seen before the crowd scattered to their homes.

A pyrotechnic display followed—and no mean exhibition of the sort neither—for in this "art" the New Mexicans are adepts.

After the fireworks came the "fandango." There we meet the same faces, without much alteration in costumes. The señoras and señoritas alone have doffed their morning dresses, and here and there a pretty pobлана has changed her coarse woolen "nagua" for a gay flounced muslin.

The ball was held in the large saloon of the "Casa de Cabildo," which occupied one side of the "Plaza." On this festival day there was no exclusiveness. In the frontier towns of Mexico not much at any time, for, notwithstanding the distinctions of class, and the domineering tyranny of the government authorities, in matters of mere amusement there is a sort of democratic equality, a mingling of high and low, that in other countries is rare. English and even American travelers have observed this with astonishment.

All were admitted to the "Salon de baile" who chose to pay for it; and alongside the rico in fine broadcloth you might see the ranchero in his leathern jacket and velvetene calzoneros; while the daughter of the rich comerciante danced in the same set with the "aldeana," whose time was taken up in kneading tortillas or weaving rebosos!

The comandante with Roblado and the lieutenant figured at the fandango in full uniform. The alcalde was there with his gold-headed cane and tassel; the cura in his shovel hat; the padres in their swinging robes; and all the "familias principales" of the place.

There was the rich comerciante, Don Jose Rincon, with his fat wife and four sleepy-looking daughters; there too the wife and family of the alcalde; there the Echevarrias, with their brother the "beau," in full Paris costume, with dress coat and crush-hat, the only one to be seen in the saloon. There too the rich hacendado, Señor Gomez del Monte, with his lean wife and several rather lean daughters—differing in that respect from the hundreds of kine that roam over the pastures of his "ganada." And there too, observed of all, was the lovely Catalina de Cruces, the daughter of the wealthy miner Don Ambrosio, who himself is by her side, keeping a watchful eye upon her.

Besides these grand people there were employees of the mines of less note, clerks of the comerciantes, young farmers of the valley, gambucinos, vaqueros, ciboleros, and even "leperos" of the town, shrouded in their cheap serapes. A motley throng was the fandango.

The music consisted of a bandolon, a harp and fiddle, and the dances were the waltz, the bolero and the coona. It is but just to say that finer dancing could not have been witnessed in

the saloons of Paris. Even the peon, in his leathern spencer and calzoneros, moved as gracefully as a professor of the art; and the poblanas, in their short skirts and gay-colored slippers, swept over the floor like so many coryphees of the ballet.

Roblado, as usual, was pressing his attentions on Catalina, and danced almost every set with her; but her eye wandered from his gold epaulettes and seemed to search the room for some other object. She was evidently indifferent to the remarks of her partner, and tired of his company.

Vizcarra's eyes were also in search of some one that did not appear to be present, for the comandante strolled to and fro, peering into every group and corner with a dissatisfied look.

If it was the fair blonde he was looking for, he would be unsuccessful. She was not there. Rosita and her mother had returned home after the exhibition of the fireworks. Their house was far down the valley, and they had gone to it, accompanied by Carlos and the young ranchero. These, however, had returned to be present at the fandango. It was late before they made their appearance, the road having detained them. This was why the eye of Catalina wandered. Unlike Vizcarra, however, she was not to meet with disappointment.

While the dance was going on two young men entered the saloon, and soon mingled with the company. One of them was the young ranchero, the other was Carlos. The latter might easily have been distinguished by the heron-plume that waved over his black sombrero.

The eye of Catalina was no longer restless. It was now directed upon an object, though its glances were not fixed, but quick and stolen—stolen, because of the observation of an angry father and a jealous lover.

Carlos assumed indifference, though his heart was burning. What would he not have given to have danced with her? But he knew the situation too well. He knew that the offer of such a thing would lead to a scene. He dared not propose it.

At times he fancied that she had ceased to regard him—that she even listened with interest to Roblado—to the beau Echevarria—to others. This was but Catalina's fine acting. It was meant for other eyes than those of Carlos, but he knew not that, and became piqued.

He grew restless, and danced. He chose for his partner a very pretty "aldeana," Lacz Gonzales by name, who was delighted to dance with him. Catalina saw this, and became jealous in turn.

This play continued for a length of time, but Carlos at length grew tired of his partner, and sat down upon the *banqueta* alone. His eyes followed the movements of Catalina. He saw that hers were bent upon him with glances of love—love that had been avowed in words—yes, had already been plighted upon oath. Why should they suspect each other?

The confidence of both hearts was restored; and now the excitement of the dance, and the less zealous guardianship of Don Ambrosio, half drunk with wine, gave confidence to their eyes, and they gazed more boldly and frequently at one another.

The ring of dancers whirling round the room passed close to where Carlos sat. It was a waltz. Catalina was waltzing with the beau Echevarria. At each circle her face was toward Carlos, and then their eyes met. In these transient but oft recurring glances the eyes of a Spanish maid will speak volumes, and Carlos was reading in those of Catalina a pleasant tale. As she came round the room for a third time, he noticed something held between her fingers, which rested over the shoulder of her partner. It was a sprig with leaves of a dark greenish hue. When passing close to him, the sprig, dexterously detached, fell upon his knees, while he could just hear, uttered in a soft whisper, the word—"Tuya!"

Carlos caught the sprig, which was a branch of "tuya," or cedar. He well understood its significance; and after pressing it to his lips, he passed it through the button-hole of his embroidered "jaqueta."

As Catalina came round again, the glances exchanged between them were those of mutual and confiding love.

The night wore on—Don Ambrosio at length became sleepy, and carried off his daughter, escorted by Roblado.

Soon after most of the ricos and fashionables left the saloon, but some tireless votaries of Terpsichore still lingered until the rosy Aurora peeped through the "rejas" of the Casa de Cabildo.

CHAPTER V.

THE "Llano Estacado," or "Staked Plain" of the hunters, is one of the most singular formations of the Great American Prairie. It is a table-land, or "steppe," rising above the regions around it to a height of nearly one thousand feet, and of an oblong or leg-of-mutton form, trending from north to south.

It is four hundred miles in length, and at its widest part between two and three hundred. Its superficial area is about equal to the island

of Ireland. Its surface aspect differs considerably from the rest of prairie land, nor is it of uniform appearance in every part. Its northern division consists of an arid steppe, sometimes treeless, for an extent of fifty miles, and sometimes having a stunted covering of mezquite (*acacia*), of which there are two distinct species. This steppe is in several places rent by chasms a thousand feet in depth, and walled in on both sides by rugged impassable precipices. Vast masses of shapeless rocks lie along the beds of these great clefts, and pools of water appear at long intervals, while stunted cedars grow among the rocks, or cling from the seams of the cliffs.

Such chasms, called "canyons," can only be crossed, or even entered, at certain points, and these passes are frequently a score of miles distant from each other.

On the upper plain the surface is often a dead level for a hundred miles, and as firm as a macadamized road. There are spots covered with a turf of grass of the varieties known as gramma, buffalo, and mezquite; and sometimes the traveler encounters a region where shallow ponds of different sizes stud the plain—a few being permanent, and surrounded by sedge. Most of these ponds are more or less brackish, some sulphurous, and others perfectly salt. After heavy rains such aqueous deposits are more numerous, and their waters sweeter; but rain seems to fall by accident over this desolate region, and after long spells of drought the greater number of these pools disappear altogether.

Toward the southern end of the Llano Estacado the surface exhibits a very singular phenomenon—a belt of sand-hills, nearly twenty miles in breadth and full fifty in length, stretching north and south upon the plain. These hills are of pure white sand, thrown up in ridges, and sometimes in cones, to the height of a hundred feet, and without tree, bush, or shrub, to break their soft outlines, or the uniformity of their color. But the greatest anomaly of this geological puzzle is, that water-ponds are found in their very midst—even among their highest ridges—and this water not occasional, as from rains, but lying in "lagunas," with reeds, rushes, and *nymphae* growing in them, to attest that the water is permanent! The very last place where water might be expected to make a lodgment.

Such formations of drift-sand are common upon the shores of the Mexican Gulf, as well as on European coasts, and there their existence is easily explained; but here, in the very heart of a continent, it cannot be regarded as less than a singular phenomenon.

This sand-belt is passable at one or two points, but horses sink to the knees at every step, and but for the water it would be a perilous experiment to cross it.

Where is the Llano Estacado? Unroll your map of North America. You will perceive a large river called the Canadian, rising in the Rocky Mountains, and running, first southerly, and then east, until it becomes part of the Arkansas. As this river bends eastwardly, it brushes the northern end of the Llano Estacado, whose bluffs sometimes approach close to its banks, and at other times are seen far off, resembling a range of mountains—for which they have been frequently mistaken by travelers.

The boundary of the west side of the "Staked Plain" is more definite. Near the head-waters of the Canadian another large river has its source. This is the Pecos. Its course, you will observe, is nearly south, but your map is not correct, as for several hundred miles the Pecos runs within a few degrees of east. It afterward takes a southerly direction, before it reaches its embouchure in the Rio Grande. Now the Pecos washes the whole western base of the Llano Estacado; and it is this very plain, elevated as it is, that turns the Pecos into its southerly course, instead of leaving it to flow eastward, like all the other prairie-streams that head in the Rocky Mountains.

The eastern boundary of the Llano Estacado is not so definitely marked, but a line of some three hundred miles from the Pecos, and cutting the headwaters of the Wichita, the Louisiana Red, the Brazos, and Colorado, will give some idea of its outline. These rivers, and their numerous tributaries, all head in the eastern "ceja" (brow) of the Staked Plain, which is cut and channeled by their streams into tracks of the most rugged and fantastic forms.

At the south the Llano Estacado tapers to a point, declining into the mezquite plains and valleys of numerous small streams that debouch into the Lower Rio Grande.

This singular tract is without one fixed dweller; even the Indian never makes abode upon it beyond the few hours necessary to rest from his journey, and there are parts where he—inured as he is to hunger and thirst—dare not venture to cross it. So perilous is the "jornada," or crossing of the Llano Estacado, that throughout all its length of four hundred miles there are only two places where travelers can effect it in safety! The danger springs from the want of water, for there are spots of grass in abundance; but even on the well-known

routes there are, at certain seasons, stretches of sixty and eighty miles where not a drop of water is to be procured!

In earlier times one of these routes was known as the "Spanish Trail," from Santa Fe to San Antonio de Bexar, of Texas; and lest travelers should lose their way, several points were marked with "palos," or stakes. Hence the name it has received.

The Llano Estacado is now rarely traveled, except by the *ciboleros*, or Mexican buffalo-hunters, and "Comancheros," or Indian traders. Parties of these cross it from the settlements of New Mexico, for the purpose of hunting the buffalo, and trafficking with the Indian tribes that roam over the plains to the east. Neither the hunt nor the traffic is of any great importance, but it satisfies a singular race of men, whom chance or inclination has led to the adopting it as a means of subsistence.

These men are to the Mexican frontier pretty much what the hunter and backwoodsman are upon the borders of the Anglo-American settlements. They are, however, in many respects different from the latter—in arms and equipments, modes of hunting, and otherwise.

The outfit of a *cibolero*, who is usually also a *coureur de bois*, is very simple. For hunting, he is mounted on a tolerable—sometimes a fine—horse; and armed with a bow and arrows, a hunting-knife, and a long lance. Of fire-arms he knows and cares nothing—though there are exceptional cases. A lazo is an important part of his equipment. For trading, his stock of goods is very limited—often not costing him twenty dollars! A few bags of coarse bread (an article of food which the prairie Indians are fond of), a sack of "pinole," some baubles for Indian ornament, some coarse serapes, and pieces of high-colored woolen stuffs, woven at home; these constitute his "invoice." Hard-ware goods he does not furnish to any great extent. These stand him too high in his own market, as they reach it only after long carriage and scandalous imposts. Fire-arms he has nothing to do with; such prairie Indians as use these are furnished from the eastern side; but many Spanish pieces—fusils and escopettes—have got into the hands of the Comanches through their forays upon the Mexican towns of the south.

In return for his outlay and perilous journey, the *cibolero* carries back dried buffalo-flesh and hides—some the produce of his own hunting, some procured by barter from the Indians.

Horses, mules, and asses, are also articles of exchange. Of these the prairie Indians possess vast herds—some individuals owning hundreds; and most of them with Mexican brands! In other words, they have been stolen from the towns of the Lower Rio Grande, to be sold to the towns of the Upper Rio Grande, and the trade is deemed perfectly legitimate—at least, there is no help for it as the case stands.

The *cibolero* goes forth on the plains with a rare escort. Sometimes a large number of these men, taking their wives and families with them, travel together just like a tribe of wild Indians. Generally, however, one or two leaders, with their servants and equipage, form the expedition. They experience less molestation from the savages than ordinary travelers. The Comanches and other tribes know their object, and rather encourage them to come among them. Notwithstanding, they are often cheated and ill-used by these double-faced dealers. Their mode of transport is the pack-mule, and the "carreta" drawn by mules or oxen. The carreta is of itself a picture of primitive locomotion. A pair of block-wheels, cut out of a cottonwood tree, are joined by a stout wooden axle. The wheels usually approach nearer to the oval, or square, than the circular form. A long tongue leads out from the axle-tree, and upon top of this a square, deep, box-like body is placed. To this two or more pairs of oxen are attached in the most simple manner—by lashing a cross-piece of wood to their horns which has already been made fast to the tongue. The animals have neither yoke nor harness, and the forward push of the head is the motive power by which the carreta is propelled. Once in motion, the noise of the wooden axle is such as to defy description. The cries of a whole family, with children of all sizes, in bitter agony, can alone represent the concert of terrible sounds; and we must go to South Mexico to find its horrid equal in a troop of howling monkeys.

CHAPTER VI.

ABOUT a week after the fiesta of St. John, a small party of *ciboleros* was seen crossing the Pecos, at the ford of the "Bosque Redondo." The party was only five in number, and consisted of a white man, a half-blood, and three pure-bred Indians, having with them a small *atajo* of pack-mules, and three ox-team carretas. The crouching trot of the Indians, as well as their tilma dresses and sandaled feet, showed that they were "Indios manzos." They were, in fact, the hired *peons* of Carlos the *cibolero*—the white man, and chief of the party.

The half-blood—Antonio by name—was "arriero" of the mule-train, while the three Indians drove the ox-teams, guiding them across the ford with their long goads. Carlos himself

was mounted upon his fine black horse, and, muffled in a strong serape, rode in front to pilot the way. His beautiful *manga* had been left behind, partly to save it from the rough wear of such an expedition, and also that it might not excite the cupidity of the prairie Indians, who, for such a beautiful mantle as it was, would not hesitate to take his scalp. Besides the *manga*, the embroidered jacket, the scarlet scarf, and velvet *calzoneros*, had all been put off, and others of a coarser kind were now worn in their place.

This was an important expedition for Carlos. He carried with him the largest freight he had ever taken upon the prairies. Besides the three carretas, with four oxen each, the *atajo* consisted of five pack-mules, all loaded with merchandise—the carretas with bread, pinole, Spanish beans, Chile peppers; and the packs were made up of serape blankets, coarse woolen cloth, and a few showy trinkets, as also some Spanish knives, with their pointed triangular blades. It was his bold luck on the day of the fiesta that had enabled him to provide such a stock. In addition to his own original *onza* and the two he had won, the young *ranchero*, Don Juan, had insisted upon his accepting the loan of five others toward an outfit for this expedition.

The little troop, having safely forded the Pecos, headed toward the "ceja" of the Llano Estacado, that was not far distant from the crossing of Bosque Redondo. A sloping ravine brought them to the top of the "mesa," where a firm, level road lay before them—a smooth plain, without brake or bush to guide them on their course.

But the *cibolero* needed no guide. No man knew the Staked Plain better than he; and, setting his horse's head in a direction a little south of east, the train moved on. He was striking for one of the head branches of the Red River of Louisiana, where he had heard that for several seasons past the buffalo had appeared in great numbers. It was a new route for him—as most of his former expeditions had been made to the upper forks of the Texan rivers Brazos and Colorado. But the plains around these rivers were at this time in undisputed possession of the powerful tribe of Comanches and their allies, the Kiawas, Lipans and Tonkawas. Hence, these Indians, uninterrupted in their pursuit of the buffalo, had rendered the latter wild and difficult of approach, and had also thinned their numbers. On the waters of the Red river the case was different. This was hostile ground. The Wacoas, Panes, Osages, and bands from the Cherokee, Kickapoo and other nations to the east, occasionally hunted there, and sanguinary conflicts occurred among them; so that one party or another often lost their season's hunt by the necessity of keeping out of each other's range; and the game was thus left undisturbed. It is a well-known fact that in a neutral or "hostile ground" the buffalo, as well as other game, are found in greatest abundance, and are there more easily approached than elsewhere.

With a knowledge of these facts, Carlos, the *cibolero*, had determined to risk an expedition to the Red river, whose head-waters have their source in the eastern "ceja" of the Llano Estacado, and not in the Rocky Mountains, as laid down upon maps.

Carlos was well armed for hunting the buffalo—so was the half-blood Antonio—and two of the three *peons* were also experienced hunters. Their arms consisted of the bow and lance, both weapons being preferable to firearms for buffalo-hunting. In one of the carretas, however, might be seen a weapon of another kind—a long brown American rifle. This Carlos kept for other and higher game, and he well knew how to use it. But how came such a weapon into the hands of a Mexican *cibolero*? Remember, Carlos was not of Mexican origin. The weapon was a family relic. It had been his father's.

We shall not follow Carlos and his "caravan" through all the details of their weary "journeys" across the desert plain. At one place they made a "jornada" of seventy miles without water. But the experienced Carlos knew how to accomplish this without the loss of a single animal.

He traveled thus. Having given his cattle as much as they would drink at the last watering-place, he started in the afternoon, and traveled until near daybreak. Then a halt of two hours was made, so that the animals should graze while the dew was still on the grass. Another long march followed, continuing until noon, then a rest of three or four hours brought the cool evening, when a fresh spell of marching brought the "jornada" to its end, far on in the following night. Such is the mode of traveling still practiced on the desert steppes of Chihuahua, Sonora, and North Mexico.

After several days' traveling the *cibolero* and his party descended from the high "mesa," and passing down its eastern slope, arrived on a tributary of the Red river. Here the scenery assumed a new aspect—the aspect of the "rolling" prairie. Gentle declivities, with soft, rounded tops declining into smooth, verdant vales, along which meandered streams of clear

and sparkling water. Here and there along the banks stood groves of trees, such as the evergreen, live oak, the beautiful "pecan," with its oblong, edible nuts; the "overcup," with its odd-looking acorns; the hackberry, with its nettle-shaped leaves and sweet fruits, and the silvery cottonwood. Along the swells could be seen large trees standing apart, and at almost equal distances, as though planted for an orchard. Their full, leafy tops gave them a fine appearance, and their light pinnate leaves, with the long, brown legumes hanging from their branches, told they were the famous "mesquite" trees—the American acacia. The red mulberry could be seen in the creek bottoms, and here and there the beautiful wild-china-tree, with its pretty lilac flowers. The whole surface both of hill and valley was clad in a rich mantle of short buffalo grass, which gave it the aspect of a meadow lately mown, and springing into fresh verdure. It was a lovely landscape, and no wonder the wild bulls of the prairies chose it for their favorite range.

The *cibolero* had not traveled far through this favored region until he came upon the buffalo sign—"roads," "wallows," and "bois de vache;" and next morning he found himself in the midst of vast herds, roaming about like tame cattle, and browsing at their leisure. So little shy were they, they scarce deigned to make off at his approach!

Of course he had reached the end of his journey. This was his great stock farm. These were his own cattle—as much his as any one else's; and he had nothing more to do but set to killing and curing.

As to his trade with the Indians, that would take place whenever he should chance to fall in with a party—which he would be certain to do in the course of the season.

Like all men of the prairie, rude trappers as well as Indians, Carlos had an eye for the picturesque, and therefore chose a beautiful spot for his camp. It was a grassy bottom, through which ran a clear "arroyo" of sweet water, shaded by pecan, mulberry, and wild-china-trees, and under the shadow of a mulberry grove his carretas were halted and his tent was pitched.

CHAPTER VII.

CARLOS had commenced his hunt, and was making rapid progress. In the first two days he had slaughtered no less than twenty buffaloes, and had them all carried to camp. He and Antonio followed the buffalo and shot them down, while two of the *peons* skinned the animals, cut up the meat, and packed it to camp. There, under the hands of the third, it underwent the further process of being "jerked," that is, cut into thin slices and dried in the sun.

The hunt promised to be profitable. Carlos would no doubt obtain as much "tasajo" as he could carry home, besides a large supply of hides, both of which found ready sale in the towns of New Mexico.

On the third day, however, the hunters noticed a change in the behavior of the buffalo. They had suddenly grown wild and wary. Now and then vast gangs passed them, running at full speed, as if terrified and pursued! It was not Carlos and his companion that had so frightened them. What then had set them a-running?

Carlos conjectured that some Indian tribe was in the neighborhood engaged in hunting them.

His conjecture proved correct. On ascending a ridge which gave him a view of a beautiful valley beyond, his eye rested upon an Indian encampment.

It consisted of about fifty lodges, standing like tents along the edge of the valley, and fronting toward the stream. They were of a conical form, constructed of a framework of poles set in a circle, drawn together at their tops, and then covered with skins of the buffalo.

"Waco lodges!" said the *cibolero*, the moment his practiced eye fell upon them.

"Master," inquired Antonio, "how do you tell that?" Antonio's experience fell far short of that of his master, who from childhood had spent his life on the prairies.

"How?" replied Carlos; "by the lodges themselves."

"I should have taken it for a Comanche camp," said the half-blood. "I have seen just such lodges among the 'Buffalo-eaters.'"

"Not so, Antonio," rejoined his master. "In the Comanche lodge the poles meet at the top, and are covered over with the skins, leaving no outlet for smoke. You observe it is not so with these. They are lodges of the Wacoas, who, it is true, are allies of the Comanches."

Such was in reality the fact. The poles, though bent so as to approach each other at the top, did not quite meet, and an open hole remained for the passage of smoke. The lodge, therefore, was not a perfect cone, but the frustum of one; and in this it differed from the lodge of the Comanches.

"The Wacoas are not hostile," remarked the *cibolero*. "I think we have nothing to fear from them. No doubt they will trade with us. But where are they?"

This question was drawn forth by the *cibolero* observing that not a creature was to be

seen about the lodges—neither man, woman, child, nor animal! And yet it could not be a deserted camp. Indians would not abandon such lodges as these—at least they would not leave behind the fine robes that covered them! No, the owners must be near; no doubt, among the neighboring hills, in pursuit of the buffalo.

The cibolero guessed aright. As he and his companion stood looking down upon the encampment, a loud shouting reached their ears, and the next moment a body of several hundred horsemen was seen approaching over a swell of the prairie. They were riding slowly, but their panting, foaming horses showed that they had just left off harder work. Presently another band, still more numerous, appeared in the rear. These were horses and mules laden with huge brown masses, the buffalo-meat packed up in the shaggy hides. This train was conducted by the women and boys, and followed by troops of dogs and screaming children.

As they came toward the encampment from an opposite direction, Carlos and his companion were not for a while seen.

The Indians, however, had not been long among the lodges before the quick eye of one caught sight of their two heads above the ridge. A warning cry was uttered, and in a moment every one of the dismounted hunters was back in his saddle and ready for action. One or two galloped off toward the meat-train, which had not yet come into camp, while others rode to and fro, exhibiting symptoms of alarm.

No doubt they were under apprehensions that the Panes, their mortal foes, had stolen a march upon them.

Carlos soon relieved them from this apprehension. Spurring his horse to the crest of the ridge, he drew up in full view of the Indians. A few signs, which he well knew how to make, and the word "amigo!" shouted at the top of his voice, restored their confidence; then a young fellow now rode out in front, and advanced up the hill. When sufficiently near to be heard he halted, and a conversation, partly by signs and partly by means of a little Spanish, enabled him and Carlos to understand each other. The Indian then galloped back, and after a short interval, returned again and invited the cibolero and his companion to the encampment.

Carlos of course accepted the courtesy, and a few minutes after he and Antonio were eating fresh buffalo beef, and chatting in perfect amity with their new hosts.

The chief, a fine-looking man, and evidently possessing full authority, became particularly friendly with Carlos, and was much pleased at hearing that the latter had a stock of goods. He promised to visit his camp the next morning and allow his tribe to trade. As the cibolero had conjectured, they were Waco Indians—a noble race, one of the noblest of the prairie tribes.

Carlos returned to his camp in high spirits. He would now have his goods exchanged for mules—so the chief promised—and these were the main objects of his expedition.

In the morning, according to appointment, the Indians arrived, chief and all; and the little valley where the cibolero had encamped was filled with men, women and children. The packs were opened, the goods were set forth, and the whole day was spent in continuous trading. The cibolero found his customers perfectly honest; and when night came, and they took their departure, not a single item of Carlos's stock remained on his hands. In its place, however, a handsome *mulada* of no less than thirty mules was seen picketed in the bottom of the little valley. These were now the property of Carlos, the cibolero. Not a bad outlay of his eight onzas!

Not only would they yield well on his return, but it was his intention that each of them should carry back its full load of buffalo-hides, or "tasajo."

It would be a successful expedition, indeed; and dreams of future wealth, with the hope of being some day in a condition to advance a legitimate claim to the hand of the fair Catalina, were already passing through the mind of Carlos.

Once a "rico," reflected he, even Don Ambrosio might sanction his suit. On that night soft was the slumber and pleasant the dreams of Carlos, the cibolero.

CHAPTER VIII.

NEXT day he followed his hunting with increased ardor. He was now provided with the means of transport to any amount. There was no fear he should have to leave either his robes or tasajo behind. With his own mules—he had now thirty-five—and that number, with the three carretas, would carry a splendid freight—of the value of hundreds of dollars.

He had already obtained some dressed robes from the Indians. For these he had parted with everything for which an Indian would trade. Even the buttons from off his jacket and those of his men, the bullion bands and shining tags of their sombreros—everything about them that glittered!

Their arms of course not. These the Wacos did not want. They had similar ones them-

selves, and could manufacture them at will. They would have purchased the long, brown rifle; but that was a souvenir Carlos would not have parted with for a score of mules.

For the next day or two the cibolero continued his hunting. He found the buffalo grow every hour more excited and wild. He noticed, too, that the "running" gangs came from the north, while the Wacos were hunting to the southward of his camp! It could not be the latter that were disturbing them. Who then?

On the third night after his trade with the Indians, Carlos had retired to rest with his people. Antonio kept watch until midnight, at which hour he was to be relieved by one of the peons.

Antonio had grown very sleepy. His hard riding after the buffalo had wearied him; and he was doing his best to keep awake for the last half-hour of his vigil, when a snort reached his ears from the direction of the *mulada*.

This brought him to himself. He placed his ear to the ground and listened. Another snort louder than the first came from the *mulada*—another—and another—quick in succession!

"What can it mean? Coyotes? or, perhaps, a bear? I shall wake my master," said Antonio to himself.

Stealing gently to the side of Carlos, the half-blood shook the sleeper by the arm. A slight shake was enough, for in an instant the cibolero was upon his feet and handling his rifle. He always resorted to this weapon in cases of danger, such as a hostile attack by Indians, using his bow only in the chase.

After a word or two had passed between Carlos and Antonio the three peons were awakened, and all five stood to their arms. The little party remained in the midst of the carretas, which had been drawn up so as to form a small triangular corral. The high boxes of these would be an excellent protection against arrows; and, as there was no fire in the camp to make a light, they could not be seen from without. The camp, moreover, was shadowed by the thick foliage of the mulberries, which rendered it still more obscure; while its occupants commanded a view of the prairie in front. But for the wood corpses which stood at intervals, they could have seen the whole ground both up and down the valley and along its sides. These corpses, however, might have concealed any number of foes.

The hunters remained silent, listening intently. At one time they fancied they could see a dark form crouching along the ground in the direction of the *mulada*, that was picketed not a hundred yards off. The light, however, was so uncertain, not one of the five could be sure of this. Whatever it was, it moved very slowly, for it appeared to remain near the same spot.

Carlos at length set himself to observe it more closely. He stole out from the corral, and, followed by Antonio, crawled along the ground. When the two had got nearer the dark object, it was distinctly seen to move.

"There is something!" whispered the cibolero.

At that moment the mules again snorted, and one or two of them struck the ground with their hoofs, as if startled.

"It must be a bear, I fancy," continued Carlos. "It has the appearance of one. It will stampede the animals—a shot will be less likely to do so."

As he said this he raised his rifle, and taking aim as well as the darkness would allow him, pulled trigger and fired.

It seemed as if the shot had invoked all the demons of the infernal regions. A hundred voices burst forth in one simultaneous yell, the hoofs of a hundred horses rung upon the turf, the *mulada* got into motion, the mules squealing and plunging violently, and the next moment every one of them had broken their lariats, and were running at a furious gallop out of the valley! A dark band of yelling horsemen was seen closing in after and driving them off; and, before Carlos could recover from his surprise, both mules and Indians had disappeared out of sight and hearing!

Not a single one remained of the whole *mulada*. The ground upon which they had been picketed was swept perfectly clear!

CHAPTER IX.

THE first streaks of daylight were just falling upon the prairie, when the quick, keen eye of the half-blood, ranging the ground in every direction, was arrested by the appearance of something odd upon the grass. It lay near the spot where the *mulada* had been picketed. It was a darkish object in a recumbent position. Was it bushes or gorse? No. It could not be that. Its outlines were different. It was more like some animal lying down—perhaps a large wolf? It was near the place where they had fancied that they saw something in the darkness, and at which Carlos had fired.

Antonio, on first perceiving the object, called his master's attention to it, and both now gazed over the box of the carreta, scanning it as well as the gray light would permit them.

As this became brighter, the object was seen more distinctly, while at each moment the curiosity of the ciboleros increased. They would have long since gone out to examine it

more closely; but they were not yet free from apprehensions of a second attack from the Indians, and they prudently remained within the corral.

At length, however, they could forego an examination no longer. They had formed their suspicion of what the object was, and Carlos and Antonio climbed over the carretas, and proceeded toward it.

On arriving at the spot they were not so much surprised—for they had partially anticipated such a thing—at finding the body of a dead Indian. It was lying flat upon the grass, face downward, and on closer examination, a wound, from which much blood had run, was perceived in the side. There was the mark of a rifle bullet—Carlos had not fired in vain!

They bent down, and turned over the body to examine it. The savage was in full war costume—that is, naked to the waist, and painted over the breast and face so as to render him as frightful as possible; but what struck the ciboleros as most significant was the *costume of his head*! This was close shaven over the temples and behind the ears. A patch upon the top was clipped short, but in the center of the crown one long lock of hair remained uncut, and this lock was intermingled with plumes, and plaited so as to hang, queue-like, down the back. The naked temples were stained with vermilion, and the cheeks and bosom daubed in a similar manner. These brilliant spots contrasted with the colorless and deathly hue of the skin, and with the blanched lips and glazed eyeballs, gave to the corpse a hideous appearance.

Carlos, after gazing upon it for some moments, turned to his companion with a look of intelligence, and pointing to the shaved head, and then to the moccasins upon the Indian's feet, in a tone that expressed the satisfaction he had felt at the discovery, pronounced the word:

"Pane!"

The dead Indian was a Pane beyond doubt. The tonsure of his hair, the cut of his moccasins, his war paint, enabled Carlos to tell this.

Just then both he and Antonio remembered that the Panes had themselves gone in the direction of the Waco camp! It was not two miles distant—they could hardly fail to find it, even in the night. What if they had taken the Wacos by surprise and had already made their attack!

Carlos feared he might be too late to give warning. His Waco friends may have already perished! Whether or no, he determined to proceed at once to their encampment.

Leaving Antonio and the peons with directions to guard and defend his own camp to the last, he rode off, armed both with rifle and bow. It was yet but gray day, but he knew the trail leading to the Waco village, and followed it without difficulty. He rode with caution, scanning the timber copses before approaching them, and running his eye along the crests of the ridges as he advanced.

This caution was not unnecessary. The Panes could not be far off—they might still be in ambush between him and the Waco camp, or halted among the hills.

The cibolero had but little fear of meeting one or two of them. He rode a horse in which he had full confidence; and he knew that no Pane could overtake him; but he might be surrounded by numbers and intercepted before he could reach the Waco lodges. That was the reason why he advanced with so much caution.

His ears were set to listen attentively. Every sound was noted and weighed—the "gobble" of the wild turkey from the branches of the oak; the drumming of the ruffed grouse on some dry knoll; the whistling of the fallow-deer; or the tiny bark of the prairie marmot. All these were well-known sounds; and as each was uttered, the cibolero stopped and listened attentively. Under other circumstances he would not have heeded them, but he knew that these sounds could be imitated, and his ear was bent to detect any counterfeit. He could distinguish the Pane trail of the previous night. A strong band there must have been, by the numerous tracks on the grass. At the crossing of a stream Carlos could detect the prints of moccasins in the sand. There were still some of the party afoot then, though, no doubt, the stolen *mulada* had mounted a good many.

Carlos rode on with more caution than ever. He was half-way to the Waco village, and still the Pane trail led in that direction. Surely these could not have passed without finding it? Such skilled warriors as the Panes would not. They would see the trail of the Wacos leading to the cibolero's own camp—they would soon discover the lodges—perhaps they had already made their attack—perhaps!

The reflections of the cibolero were suddenly interrupted; distant sounds fell upon his ear—shouts and cries of fearful import—with that continued murmur that results from the mingling of many voices in loud and confused clamor. Now and then was heard a whoop, or a cheer, or a shrill whistle, rising above the ordinary noises, and carrying far over the plain its tones of triumph or revenge.

Carlos knew the import of these shouts and cries—they were the sounds of battle!—of terrible and deadly strife!

They came from behind the hill—the cibolero was just climbing it.

He spurred his horse, and galloping forward to its crest, looked down into the valley. The conflict was raging before him!

He had a full view of the dreadful scene. Six hundred dusky horsemen were riding about on the plain; some dashing at each other with couched lances—some twanging their bows from a distance; and others close together in the hand-to-hand combat of the deadly tomahawk! Some were charging in groups with their long spears—some wheeling into flight, and others, dismounted, were battling on foot! Some took shelter among the timber islands, and sprung out again as they saw an opportunity of sending an arrow, or lancing a foe in the back; and so the red contest continued.

The first impulse of the cibolero was to gallop forward and mingle in the fight—of course, taking side with the Wacoos. The sound of the conflict roused his blood, and the sight of the robbers who had so lately ruined him rendered him eager for revenge. Many of them were mounted upon the very mules they had taken from him, and Carlos was determined to have some of them back again.

He was about to put spurs to his horse, and dash forward, when a sudden change seemed to occur in the conflict that decided him to remain where he was. The Panes were giving way!

Many of them were seen wheeling out of the plain, and taking to flight.

As Carlos looked down the hill, he saw three of the Pane warriors in full run, making up to the spot where he stood. Most of the band were still fighting, or had fled in a different direction; but these, cut off from the rest, came directly up the hill at a gallop.

The cibolero had drawn his horse under the cover of some trees, and was not perceived by them until they were close to the spot.

At this moment the war-cry of the Wacoos was heard directly in their rear, and Carlos saw that two mounted warriors of that tribe were in pursuit. The fugitives looked back, and, seeing only two adversaries after them, once more wheeled round and gave fight.

At their first charge one of the pursuers was killed, and the other—whom Carlos now recognized as the Waco chief—was left alone against three assailants.

The whip-like crack of the cibolero's rifle sounded on the air, and one of the Panes dropped out of his saddle. The other two, ignorant of whence the shot had come, continued their onset on the Waco chief, who, dashing close up, split the skull of one of them with his tomahawk. His horse, however, bore him rapidly past, and before he could wheel round, the remaining Pane—an active warrior—rushed after and thrust his long spear into the back of the chief. Its head passed clear through his body, completely impaling him; and with a death-whoop, the noble Indian fell from his horse to the ground.

But his enemy fell at the same time. The arrow of the cibolero was too late to save, though not to avenge, the Waco's fall. It pierced the Pane just at the moment the latter had made his thrust, and he fell to the ground simultaneously with his victim, still clutching the handle of the spear!

A fearful group lay dead upon the sward; but Carlos did not stay to contemplate it. The fight still raged in another part of the field, and, putting spurs to his horse he galloped off to take part in it.

But the Panes had now lost many of their best warriors, and a general panic had seized upon them, ending in their full flight. Carlos followed along with the victorious pursuers, now and then using his rifle upon the fleeing robbers. But fearing that a stray party of them might attack his own little camp, he turned from the line of pursuit and galloped in that direction. On arriving, he found Antonio and the peons fortified within their corral, and all safe. Stray Indians had passed them, but all apparently too much frightened to have any desire for an attack upon the little party.

As soon as the cibolero had ascertained these facts, he turned his horse and rode back toward the scene of the late conflict.

CHAPTER X.

As Carlos approached the spot where the chief had been slain, he heard the death-wail chanted by a chorus of voices.

On getting still nearer, he perceived a ring of warriors dismounted and standing around a corpse. It was that of the fallen chief. Others, fresh from the pursuit, were gathering to the place; each taking up the melancholy dirge as he drew nigh.

The cibolero alighted and walked forward to the ring. Some regarded him with looks of surprise, while others, who knew he had aided them in the fight, stepped up and grasped him by the hand. One old warrior taking Carlos's arm in his, led him forward to the ring and silently pointed to the now ghastly features, as though he was imparting to the cibolero the news that their chief was dead!

Neither he nor any of the warriors knew what part Carlos had borne in the affair. No

one, now alive, had been witness to the conflict in which the chief had fallen. Around the spot were high corpses that hid it from the rest of the field, and at the time this conflict occurred, the fight was raging in a different direction. The warrior, therefore, thought he was imparting to Carlos a piece of news, and the latter remained silent.

But there was a mystery among the braves, and Carlos saw this by their manner. Five Indians lay dead upon the ground *unscalped*! That was the mystery. They were the three Panes, and the chief with the other Waco. They could not have slain each other, and all have fallen on the spot. That was not probable. The Waco and one of the Panes lay apart. The other three were close together, just as they had fallen, the chief impaled by the Pane spear, while his slayer lay behind him still grasping the weapon! The red tomahawk was clutched firmly in the hands of the chief, and the cleft skull of the second Pane showed where it had last fallen.

So far the Indians translated the tableau, but the mystery lay not there. Who had slain the slayer of their chief? That was the puzzle. Some one must have survived this deadly strife, where five warriors had died together!

If a Pane, surely he would not have gone off without that great trophy which would have rendered him famous for life—the scalp of the Waco chief? If a Waco, where and who was he?

These questions passed from lip to lip. No one was found to answer them, but there were yet some warriors to return from the pursuit, and the inquiry was suspended, while the death-song was again chanted over the fallen chief.

At length all the braves had arrived on the spot, and stood in a circle around the body. One of the warriors stepped forward to the midst, and by a signal intimated that he wished to be heard. A breathless silence followed, and the warrior began:

"Wacoos! our hearts are sad when they should otherwise rejoice. In the midst of victory a great calamity has fallen upon us. We have lost our father—our brother! Our great chief—he whom we all loved—has fallen. Alas! In the very hour of triumph, when his strong right hand had hewn down his enemy on the field—in that moment has he fallen!"

"The hearts of his warriors are sad, the hearts of his people will long be sad!"

"Wacoos! our chief has not fallen unavenged. His slayer lies at his feet pierced with the deadly dart, and wallowing in his blood. Who of you hath done this?"

Here the speaker paused for a moment as if waiting for a reply. None was given.

"Wacoos!" he continued, "our beloved chief has fallen, and our hearts are sad. But it glads them to know that his death has been avenged. There lies his slayer, still wearing his hated scalp. What brave warrior claims the trophy? Let him step forth and take it!"

Here there was another pause, but neither voice nor movement answered the challenge.

The cibolero was silent with the rest. He did not comprehend what was said, as the speech was in the Waco tongue, and he understood it not. He guessed it related to the fallen chief and his enemies, but its exact purport was unknown to him.

"Brothers!" again resumed the orator, "brave men are modest and silent about their deeds. None but a brave warrior could have done this. We know that a brave warrior will avow it. Let him fear not to speak. The Wacoos will be grateful to the warrior who has avenged the death of their beloved chief."

Still the silence was unbroken, except by the voice of the orator.

"Brother warriors!" he continued, raising his voice and speaking in an earnest tone, "I have said that the Wacoos will be grateful for this deed. I have a proposal to make. Hear me!"

All signified assent by gestures.

"It is our custom to elect our chiefs from the braves of our tribe. I propose that we elect him now and here—here! on the red field where his predecessor has fallen. I propose for our chief the warrior who has done this deed!" And the warrior pointed to the fallen Pane.

"My voice for the brave who has avenged our chief!" cried one.

"And mine!" shouted another.

"And mine! and mine! and mine!" exclaimed all the warriors.

"Then solemnly be it proclaimed," said the orator, "that he to whom belongs this trophy," he pointed to the scalp of the Pane, "shall be chief of the Waco nation!"

"Solemnly we avow it!" cried all the warriors in the ring, each placing his hand over his heart as he spoke.

"Enough!" said the orator. "Who is chief of the Waco warriors? Let him declare himself on the spot!"

A dead silence ensued. Every eye was busy scanning the faces around the circle, every heart was beating to hail their new chief.

Carlos, unconscious of the honor that was in store for him, was standing a little to one side, observing the movements of his dusky companions with interest. He had not the slightest

idea of the question that had been put. Some one near him, however, who spoke Spanish, explained to him the subject of the inquiry, and he was about to make a modest avowal, when one of the braves in the circle exclaimed:

"Why be in doubt longer? If modesty ties the tongue of the warrior, let his weapon speak. Behold! his arrow still pierces the body of our foe. Perhaps it will declare its owner—it is a marked one!"

"True!" ejaculated the orator. "Let us question the arrow!"

And, stepping forward, he drew the shaft from the body of the Pane, and held it aloft.

The moment the eyes of the warriors fell upon its barbed head, an exclamation of astonishment passed from their lips. The head was of iron! No Waco ever used such a weapon as that!

All eyes were instantly turned on Carlos the cibolero, with looks of inquiry and admiration. All felt that it must be from his bow had sped that deadly shaft; and they were the more convinced of this because some who had noticed the third Pane pierced with a rifle bullet, had just declared the fact to the crowd.

Yes, it must be so. The pale-face was the avenger of their chief.

CHAPTER XVII.

CARLOS, who by this time had become aware of the nature of their inquiries, now stepped forward, and, in modest phrase, detailed through the interpreter how the chief had fallen, and what part he himself had borne in the conflict.

A loud murmur of applause broke from the circle of warriors, and the more excited of the young men rushed forward and grasped the cibolero's hand, uttering as they did so expressions of gratitude. Most of the warriors already knew that to him they were indebted for their safety. It was the report of his rifle, fired in the night, that had put them on their guard, and prevented the Panes from surprising their encampment, else the day's history might have been very different. In fact, the Panes, through this very signal having been heard, had been themselves surprised, and that was the true secret of their disaster and sanguinary retreat.

When, in addition to this service, it was seen how the cibolero had fought on their side, killing several of their foes, the hearts of the Wacoos were filled with gratitude; but now that it became known that the pale-faced warrior was the avenger of their beloved chief, their gratitude swelled into enthusiasm, and for some minutes their loud expressions of it alone could be heard.

When the excitement had to some extent subsided, the warrior who seemed to be recognized as the orator of the tribe, and who was regarded with great deference, again stood forth to speak. This time his speech was directed to Carlos alone.

"White warrior!" he said. "I have spoken with the braves of our nation. They all feel that they owe you deep gratitude, which words cannot repay. The purport of our recent deliberations has been explained to you. Upon this ground we vowed that the avenger of him who lies cold should be our future chief. We thought not at the time that that brave warrior was our white brother. But now we know; and should we for that be false to our vow—to our promised word? No! not even in thought; and here, with equal solemnity, we again repeat that oath."

"We repeat it!" echoed around the ring of warriors, while each with solemnity of manner placed his hand over his heart.

"White warrior!" continued the speaker, "our promise remains sacred. The honor we offer you is the greatest that we can bestow. It has never been borne but by a true warrior of the Waco tribe, for no impotent descendant of even a favorite chief has ever ruled over the braves of our nation. We do not fear to offer this honor to you. We would rejoice if you accept it. Stranger! we will be proud of a white chief when that chief is a warrior such as you! We know you better than you think. We have heard of you from our allies, the Comanche—we have heard of Carlos, the Cibolero!"

"We know you are a great warrior; and we know, too, that in your own country, among your own people, you are nothing. Excuse our freedom, but speak we not the truth? We despise your people, who are only tyrants and slaves. All these things have our Comanche brothers told us, and much more of you. We know who you are, then; we knew you when you came among us, and were glad to see you. We traded with you as a friend."

"We now hail you as a brother, and thus say—if you have no ties that bind you to your ungrateful nation, we can offer you one that will not be ungrateful. Live with us—he our chief!"

As the speaker ended, his last words were borne like an echo from lip to lip until they had gone round the full circle of warriors, and then a breathless silence ensued.

Carlos was so taken by surprise that for some moments he was unable to make reply. He was not alone surprised by the singular proposal thus singularly made to him; but the knowledge

which the speaker betrayed of his circumstances quite astonished him. True, he had traded much among the Comanches, and was on friendly terms with the tribe, some of whom, in times of peace, even visited the settlement of San Ildefonso; but it seemed odd that these savages should have noticed the fact—for fact it was—that the cibolero was somewhat of an outcast among his own people. Just then he had no time to reflect upon the singularity of the circumstances, as the warriors waited his reply.

He scarcely knew what reply to make. Hopeless outcast that he was, for a moment the proposal seemed worthy of acceptance. At home he was little better than a slave; here he would be ruler, the lord elect of all.

The Wacoos, though savages by name, were warriors, were men of hearts, human and humane. He had proofs of it before him. His mother and sister would share his destiny; but Catalina—ha! that one thought resolved him; he reflected no further.

"Generous warriors," he replied, "I feel from the bottom of my heart a full sense of the honor you have offered to confer upon me. I wish that by words I could prove how much I thank you, but I cannot. My words, therefore, shall be few and frank. It is true that in my own land I am not honored—I am one of the poorest of its people; but there is a tie that binds me to it—a tie of the heart that calls upon me to return. Wacoos, I have spoken!"

"Enough!" said the orator; "enough, brave stranger; it is not for us to inquire into the motives that guide your acts. If not our chief, you will remain our friend. We have yet a way—a poor one—left us to show our gratitude; you have suffered from our enemies; you have lost your property, but that has been recovered, and shall be yours again. Further, we entreat you to remain with us for some days, and partake of our rude hospitality. You will stay with us?"

The invitation was promptly echoed by all, and as promptly accepted.

About a week after this time an atajo of pack-mules—nearly fifty in number—loaded with buffalo-hides and tasojo, was seen struggling up the eastern cañon of the Llano Estacado, and heading in a north-westerly direction over that desert plain. The arriero, mounted upon the *mulera*, was a half-blood Indian. Three carretas, drawn by oxen and driven by dusky peons, followed the mule-train, making noise enough to frighten even the coyotes that be- hind skulked through the coverts of mezquite. A dashing horseman mounted upon a fine black steed rode in advance, who, ever and anon turning in his saddle, looked back with a satisfied glance upon the fine atajo. That horseman was Carlos.

The Wacoos had not forgotten to be generous. That train of mules and those heavy packs were the gift of the tribe to the avenger of their chief. But that was not all. In the breast pocket of the cibolero's jacket was a "bolsa," filled with rare stuff, also a present from the Wacoos, who promised some day that their guest should have more of the same. What did that bolsa contain? coin? money? jewels? No. It contained only dust; but that dust was yellow and glittering. It was gold!

CHAPTER XI.

A CAVALCADE, dusty and wayworn, was seen moving toward the settlement of San Ildefonso. It consisted of an atajo of pack-mules, with some carretas drawn by oxen. One man only was on horseback, who, by his dress and manner, could be recognized as the owner of the atajo.

Despite the fatigue of a long march, despite the coating of dust which covered both horse and rider, it was not difficult to tell who the horseman was. Carlos the cibolero!

Thus far had he reached on his homeward way. Another stretch of five miles along the dusty road, and he would halt before the door of his humble rancho. Another hour, and his aged mother, his fond sister, would fling themselves into his arms, and receive his affectionate embrace!

What a surprise it would be! They would not be expecting him for weeks—long weeks.

And what a surprise he had for them in another way! His wonderful luck! The superb mules! and cargo—quite a little fortune indeed! Rosita should have a new dress—not a coarse woollen nagua, but one of silk, real foreign silk, and a manta, and the prettiest pair of satin slippers—she should wear fine stockings on future fiesta days—she should be worthy of his friend Don Juan. His old mother, too—she should drink tea, coffee, or chocolate, which she preferred—no more *atole* for her!

The rancho was rude and old—it should come down, and another and better one go up in its place—no—it would serve as a stable for the horse, and the new rancho should be built beside it. In fact, the sale of his *mulada* would enable him to buy a good strip of land, and stock it well too.

What was to hinder him to turn ranchero, and farm or graze on his own account? It

would be far more respectable, and would give him a higher standing in the settlement. Nothing to hinder him. He would do so; but first one more journey to the plains—one more visit to his Waco friends, who had promised him—Ha! it was this very promise that was the keystone of all his hopes.

The silk dress for Rosita, the luxuries for his old mother, the new house, the farm, were all pleasant dreams to Carlos; but he indulged a dream of a still pleasanter nature—a dream that eclipsed them all; and his hopes of its realization lay in that one more visit to the country of the Wacoos.

Carlos believed that his poverty alone was the barrier that separated him from Catalina. He knew that her father was not, properly speaking, one of the "rico" class. True, he was a *rico* now; but only a few years ago he had been a poor "gambucino"—poor as Carlos himself. In fact, they had once been nearer neighbors; and in his earlier days Don Ambrosio had esteemed the boy Carlos fit company for the little Catalina.

What objection, then, could he have to the cibolero—provided the latter could match him in fortune? "Certainly none," thought Carlos. "If I can prove to him that I, too, am a 'rico,' he will consent to my marrying Catalina. And why not? The blood in my veins—so says my mother—is as good as that of any *hidalgo*. And, if the Wacoos have told me the truth, one more journey and Carlos the cibolero will be able to show as much gold as Don Ambrosio the miner!"

These thoughts had been running in his mind throughout the whole of his homeward journey. Every day—every hour—did he build his airy castles; every hour did he buy the silk dress for Rosita—the tea, coffee, and chocolate for his mother; every hour did he erect the new rancho, buy the farm, show a fortune in gold-dust, and demand Catalina from her father! *Chateaux en Espagne!*

Now that he was close to his home, these pleasant visions grew brighter and seemed nearer; and the countenance of the cibolero was radiant with joy. What a fearful change was soon to pass over it!

Several times he thought of spurring on in advance, the sooner to enjoy the luxury of his mother's and sister's welcome; and then he changed his mind again.

"No," muttered he to himself; "I will stay by the atajo. I will better enjoy the triumph. We shall all march up in line, and halt in front of the rancho. They will think I have some stranger with me, to whom belong the mules? When I announce them as my own they will fancy I have turned Indian, and made a *raid* on the southern provinces, with my stout retainers. Ha! ha! ha!" And Carlos laughed at the conceit.

"Poor little Rosy!" he continued; "she shall marry Don Juan this time! I won't withhold my consent any longer! It would be better, too. He's a bold fellow, and can protect her while I'm off on the plains again; though one more journey, and I have done with the plains. One more journey, and I shall change my title from Carlos, the cibolero, to Senor Don Carlos, R— Ha! ha! ha!"

Again he laughed at the prospect of becoming a "rico," and being addressed as "Don Carlos."

"Very odd," thought he, "I don't meet any one! I don't see a soul upon the road, up or down. Yet it's not late—the sun's above the bluff still. Where can the people be? And yet the road's covered thick with fresh horse-tracks! Ha! the troops have been here! they have just passed up! But that's no reason why the people are not abroad; and I don't see even a straggler! Now, I could have believed there was an alarm of Indians had I not seen these tracks; but I know very well that, were the Apaches on their war-trail, my Comandante and his Whisker-andos would never have ventured so far from the Presidio—that I know.

"Well, there's something extraordinary! I can't make it out. Perhaps they're all up to the town at some fiesta. Anton, my boy, you know all the feast-days! Is this one?"

"No, master."

"And where are all the folks?"

"Can't guess, master! Strange we don't see some!"

"So I was thinking. You don't suppose there have been wild Indians in the neighborhood?"

"No, master—*mira!* They're the tracks of the 'lanzeros'—only an hour ago. No Indians where they are?"

As Antonio said this, both his accent and look had an expression which guided his master to the true meaning of his words, which might otherwise have been ambiguous. He did not mean that the fact of the lancers having been on the ground would prevent the Indians from occupying it, but exactly the reverse. It was, not "lancers no Indians," but "Indians no lancers," that Antonio meant.

Carlos understood him; and, as this had been his own interpretation of the tracks, he burst out into a fit of laughter.

Still no travelers appeared, and Carlos did not like it. As yet he had not thought of any misfortune to those he loved; but the unpeo-

pled road had an air of loneliness about it, and did not seem to welcome him.

As he passed on a feeling of sadness came stealing over him, which after it had fairly taken possession he could not get rid of.

He had not yet passed a settlement. There were none before reaching his own rancho, which, as already stated, was the lowest in the valley. Still the inhabitants fed the flocks far below that; and it was usual, at such an hour, to see them driving their cattle home. He neither saw cattle nor vaqueros.

The meadows on both sides, where cattle used to graze, were empty! What could it mean?

As he noticed these things an indefinite sense of uneasiness and alarm began to creep over him; and this feeling increased until he had arrived at the turning which led to his own rancho.

At length he headed around the forking angle of the road; and having passed the little copices of evergreen oaks, came within sight of the house. With a mechanical jerk he drew his horse upon his haunches, and sat in the saddle with open jaw and eyes glaring and protruded.

The rancho he could not see—for the covering interposed columns of the cacti—but through the openings along their tops a black line was visible that had an unnatural look, and a strange film of smoke hung over the azotea!

"God of heaven! what can it mean?" cried he, with a choking voice; but, without waiting to answer himself, he lanced the flanks of his horse till the animal shot off like an arrow.

The intervening ground was passed; and, flinging himself from the saddle, the cibolero rushed through the cactus-fence.

The atajo soon after came up. Antonio hurried through; and there, inside the hot, smoke-blackened walls, half-seated, half-lying on the banquetta, was his master, his head hanging forward upon his breast, and both hands nervously twisted in the long curls of his hair.

Antonio's footfall caused him to look up—only for a moment.

"Oh, God! My mother—my sister!" And, as he repeated the words, his head once more fell forward, while his broad breast rose and fell in convulsed heaving. It was an hour of mortal agony; for some secret instinct had revealed to him the terrible truth.

CHAPTER XII.

FOR some minutes Carlos remained stupefied with the shock, and made no effort to rouse himself.

A friendly hand laid upon his shoulder caused him to look up. Don Juan the ranchero was bending over him.

Don Juan's face wore a look as wretched as his own. It gave him no hope; and it was almost mechanically the words escaped his lips:

"My mother! my sister?"

"Your mother is at my house," replied Don Juan.

"And Rosita?"

Don Juan made no reply—the tears were rolling down his cheeks.

"Come, man!" said Carlos, seeing the other in as much need of consolation as himself; "out with it—let me know the worst! Is she dead?"

"No, no, no!—I hope not *dead!*"

"Carried off?"

"Alas, yes!"

"By whom?"

"The Indians."

"You are sure by *Indians?*"

As Carlos asked this question, a look of strange meaning glanced from his eyes.

"Quite sure. I saw them myself—your mother?"

"My mother! What of her?"

"She is safe. She met the savages in the doorway, was knocked senseless by a blow, and saw no more."

"But Rosita?"

"No one saw her; but certainly she was taken away by the Indians."

"You are sure they were *Indians*, Don Juan?"

"Sure of it. They attacked my house almost at the same time. They had previously driven off my cattle, and for that, one of my people was on the lookout. He saw them approach; and, before they got near, we were shut up and ready to defend ourselves. Finding this, they soon went off. Fearing for your people, I stole out as soon as they were gone, and came here. When I arrived the roof was blazing, and your mother lying senseless in the doorway. Rosita was gone! *Madre de Dios!* she was gone!"

And the young ranchero wept afresh.

"Don Juan!" said Carlos, in a firm voice; "you have been a friend—a brother—to me and mine. I know you suffer as much as I do. Let there be no tears! See! mine are dried up! I weep no more—perhaps sleep not—till Rosita is rescued or revenged. Let us to business, then! Tell me all that is known about these Indians—and quick, Don Juan! I have a keen appetite for your news!"

The ranchero detailed the various rumors that had been afloat for the three or four days pre-

ceding—as well as the actual occurrences—how the Indians had been first seen upon the upper plain; their encounter with the shepherds and the driving off of the sheep; their appearance in the valley, and their raid upon his own cattle—for it was his *ganaderio* that had suffered—and then the after circumstances already known to Carlos.

He also informed the latter of the activity shown by the troops; how they had followed that morning upon the trail of the robbers; how he had desired to accompany them with some of his people; and how the request was refused by the comandante.

"Refused?" exclaimed Carlos, interrogatively. "Yes," replied Don Juan; "he said we would only hinder the troops! I fancy his motive was his chagrin with me. He does not like me ever since the fiesta."

"Well, what then?"

"The troops returned but an hour ago. They report that they followed the trail as far as the Pecos, where it crossed, striking direct for the Llano Estacado; and, as the Indians had evidently gone off to the great plains, it would have been useless to attempt pursuing them further. So they alleged."

"The people," continued Don Juan, "will be only too glad that the savages have gone away, and will trouble themselves no further about it. I have been trying to get up a party to follow them, but not one would venture. Hopeless as it was, I intended a pursuit with my own people; but, thank God! you have come!"

"Ay, pray God it may not be too late to follow their trail. But no; only last night at midnight, you say? There's been neither rain nor high wind—it will be fresh as dew; and if ever hound—Ha! where's Cibolo?"

"At my house the dog is. He was lost this morning; we thought he had been killed or carried off; but at midday my people found him by the rancho here, covered with mud, and bleeding where he had received the prick of a spear. We think the Indians must have taken him along, and that he escaped from them on the road."

"It is strange enough—Oh! my poor Rosita!—poor lost sister!—where art thou at this moment?—where?—where?—Shall I ever see you again?—My God! my God!"

And Carlos once more sunk back into his attitude of despair.

Then suddenly springing to his feet, with clinched fist and flashing eyes, he cried out:

"Wide though the prairie plains, and faint the trail of these dastardly robbers, yet keen is the eye of Carlos the cibolero! I shall find thee yet—I shall find thee, though it cost me the search of a life. Fear not, Rosita! fear not, sweet sister! I come to your rescue! If thou art wronged, woe, woe to the tribe that has done it!" Then turning to Don Juan, he continued: "The night is on—we can do nothing to-night. Don Juan!—friend, brother!—bring me to her—to my mother."

There is a wild poetry in the language of grief, and there was poetry in the words of the cibolero; but these bursts of poetic utterance were grief, and he again returned to the serious reality of his situation. Every circumstance that could aid him in his purposed pursuit was considered and arranged in a sober and practical manner. His arms and accouterments, his horse, all were cared for, so as to be ready by the earliest hour of light. His servants and those of Don Juan, were to accompany him, and for these horses were also prepared.

Pack-mules, too, with provisions and other necessities for a long journey—for Carlos had no intention of returning without the accomplishment of his sworn purpose—rescue or revenge. His was no pursuit to be baffled by slight obstacles. He was not going to bring back the report "*no los pudimos alcanzar*." He was resolved to trail the robbers to the furthest point of the prairies—to follow them to their fastness, wherever that might be.

Don Juan was with him heart and soul, for the rancho's interest in the result was equal to his own—his agony was the same.

Their peons numbered a score—trusty Tagnos all, who loved their masters, and who, if not warriors by trade, were made so by sympathy and zeal.

Should they overtake the robbers in time, there would be no fear of the result. From all circumstances known, the latter formed but a weak band. Had this not been the case, they would never have left the valley with so trifling a booty. Could they be overtaken before joining their tribe, all might yet be well. They would be compelled to give up both their plunder and their captive, and, perhaps, pay dearly for the distress they had occasioned. Time, therefore, was a most important consideration, and the pursuers had resolved to take the trail with the earliest light of the morning.

Carlos slept not—and Don Juan only in short and feverish intervals. Both sat up in their dresses—Carlos by the bedside of his mother, who, still suffering from the effects of the blow, appeared to rave in her sleep.

The cibolero sat silent, and in deep thought. He was busied with plans and conjectures—conjectures as to what tribe of Indians the ma-

raiders could belong to. Apaches or Comanches they were not. He had met parties of both on his return. They treated him in a friendly manner, and they said nothing of hostilities against the people of San Ildefonso. Besides, no bands of these would have been in such small force as the late robbers evidently were. Carlos wished it had been they. He knew that in such a case, when it was known that the captive was his sister, she would be restored to him. But no; they had nothing to do with it. Who then?—the Yutas? Such was the belief among the people of the valley, as he had been told by Don Juan. If so, there was still a hope—Carlos had traded with a branch of this powerful and warlike tribe. He was also on friendly terms with some of its chiefs, though these were now at war with the more northern settlements.

But the Jicarillas still returned to his mind. These were Indians of a cowardly, brutal disposition, and his mortal foes. They would have scalped him on sight. If his sister was their captive, her lot was hard indeed; and the very thought of such a fate caused the cibolero to start up with a shudder, and clench his hands in a convulsive effort of passion.

It was near morning. The peons were astir and armed. The horses and mules were saddled in the patio, and Don Juan had announced that all was ready. Carlos stood by the bedside of his mother to take leave. She beckoned him near. She was still weak, for blood had flown freely from her, and her voice was low and feeble.

"My son," said she, as Carlos bent over her, "know you what Indians you are going to pursue?"

"No, mother," replied Carlos, "but I fear they are our enemies the Jicarillas."

"Have the Jicarillas beards on their faces and jewels on their fingers?"

"No, mother; why do you ask such a question?—you know they have no beards! My poor mother!" added he, turning to Don Juan; "this terrible stroke has taken her senses!"

"Follow the trail, then!" she continued, without noticing the last remark uttered by Carlos, in a whisper; "follow the trail—perhaps it will guide thee to—" and she whispered the rest into his ear.

"What, mother?" said he, starting, as if at some strange information. "Dost thou think so?"

"I have some suspicion—only suspicion—but follow the trail—it will guide thee—follow it, and be satisfied!"

"Do not doubt me, mother; I shall be satisfied of that."

"One promise before you go. Be not rash—be prudent."

"Fear not, mother! I will."

"If it be so—"

"If it be so, mother, you'll soon see me back. God bless you!—My blood's on fire—I cannot stay!—God bless you, mother!—Farewell!"

Next minute the train of mounted men, with Don Juan and Carlos at its head, passed out of the great gate, and took the road that led out from the valley.

CHAPTER XIII.

It was not yet daybreak when the party left the house, but they had not started too early. Carlos knew that they could follow the road so far as the lancers had gone, in the darkness; and it would be light enough by the time they had got to the point where these had turned back.

Five miles below the house of Don Juan the road forked—one, leading southward, was that by which Carlos had returned the evening before; the other, or left fork, led nearly in a direct line toward the Pecos, where there was a ford. The left fork had been that taken by the troopers, as their horse-tracks showed.

It was now day. They could have followed the trail at a gallop, as it was a much-traveled and well-known path. But the eye of the cibolero was not bent upon this plain trail, but upon the ground on each side of it, and this double scrutiny caused him to ride more slowly.

On both sides were cattle-tracks. These were, no doubt, made by the cattle stolen from Don Juan—in all numbering about fifty. The cibolero said they must have passed over the ground two days before. That would correspond with the time when they had been taken.

The trackers soon passed the limits of the valley, and entered the plain through which runs the Pecos. They were about approaching that stream in a direct line, and were still two miles from its banks, when the dog Cibolo, who had been trotting in advance of the party, suddenly turned to the left, and ran on in that direction. The keen eye of Carlos detected a new trail upon which the dog was running, and which parted from the track of the troopers. It ran in a direction due north.

What appeared singular both to Carlos and Don Juan was the fact of Cibolo having taken this new route, as it was not marked by a road or path of any kind, but merely by the footprints of some animals that had lately passed over it.

Had Cibolo gone that way before?

Carlos dismounted to examine the tracks.

"Four horses and one mule," he said, speaking to Don Juan. "Two of the horses shod on the fore feet only; the other two, with the mule, barefoot. All of them mounted—the mule led—perhaps with a pack. No!" he added, after a little further examination, "it's not a pack-mule!"

It scarce cost the cibolero five minutes to arrive at these conclusions. How he did so was a mystery to most of his companions—perhaps to all except the half-blood, Antonio. And yet he was right in every particular.

He continued to scrutinize the new trail for some moments longer.

"The time corresponds," said he, still addressing Don Juan. "They passed yesterday morning before the dew was dry. You are sure it was not midnight when they left your house?"

"Quite sure," replied the rancho. "It was still only midnight when I returned with your mother from the rancho. I am quite sure of that."

"One more question, Don Juan: How many Indians, think you, were in the party that made their appearance at your house—few or many?"

"Not many, I think. Two or three only could be heard yelling at once; but the trees prevented us from seeing them. I fancy, from the traces left, that the band was a very small one. It might be the same that burned the rancho. They could have arrived at my house afterward. There was time enough."

"I have reason to believe they were the same," said Carlos, still bending over the hoof-prints, "and this may be their trail."

"Think you so?" inquired Don Juan.

"I do. See—there! Is this not strange?"

The speaker pointed to the dog, who, meanwhile, had returned to the spot, and stood whimpering, and showing an evident desire to proceed by the trace newly discovered.

"Very strange," replied Don Juan. "He must have traveled it before."

"Perhaps so," said Carlos. "But it will not spoil by an hour's keeping. Let us first see where these valiant troopers have been to. I want to know that before I leave this main path. Let us on, and briskly."

All spurred their animals into a gentle gallop, the cibolero leading as before. As before, also, his eyes swept the ground on both sides in search of any trail that might diverge from that on which they traveled.

Now and then cross-paths appeared, but these were old. No horses had passed recently upon them, and he did not slacken his pace to examine them.

After a twenty-minutes' gallop the party halted upon the bank of the Pecos, at the ford. It was plain that the troopers had also halted there, and turned back without crossing! But cattle had crossed two days before—so said the cibolero—and mounted drivers. The tracks of both were visible in the mud.

Carlos rode through the shallow water to examine the other side. At a glance he saw that no troops had crossed, but some forty or fifty head of cattle.

After a long and careful examination, not only of the muddy bank, but of the plain above, he beckoned to Don Juan and the rest to ford the stream and join him.

When Don Juan came up, the cibolero said to him, in a tone full of intelligence:

"*Amigo!* you stand a fair chance to recover your cattle."

"Why do you think so?"

"Because their drivers, four in number, have been near this spot not much over twenty-four hours ago. The animals, therefore, cannot be far off."

"But how know you this?"

"Oh! that is plain enough," coolly responded the cibolero. "The men who drove your beasts were mounted on the same horses that made yonder trail."

The speaker indicated the trail which he had halted to examine, and continued: "Very probably we'll find the herd among the spurs of the *ceja yonder*."

As Carlos said this, he pointed to a number of ragged ridges that form the brow of the Llano Estacado jutted out into the plain. They appeared to be at the distance of some ten miles from the crossing.

"Shall we push on there?" asked Don Juan.

The cibolero did not give an immediate answer. He had evidently not decided yet, and was debating in his own mind what course to pursue.

"Yes," he replied, at length, in a solemn and deliberate voice. "It is better to be sure. With all my terrible suspicions, I may be wrong. She may be wrong. The two trails may yet come together."

The latter part of this was spoken in soliloquy, and, though it reached the ears of Don Juan, he did not comprehend its meaning. He was about to ask his companion for an explanation, when the latter, suddenly collecting his energies, struck the spurs into his horse, and, calling to them to follow, galloped off upon the cattle-track.

After a run of ten miles, which was made in

less than an hour, the party entered a large ravine or point of the plain that protruded, like a deep bay, into the mountain-like side of the high steppe. As they entered this, a singular spectacle came under their eyes. The ravine, near its bottom, was covered with zopilotes, or black vultures. Hundreds of them were perched upon the rocks, or wheeling overhead in the air; and hundreds of others hopped about upon the plain, flapping their broad wings as if in full enjoyment. The coyote, the larger wolf, and the grizzly bear were seen moving over the ground, or quarrelling with each other, though they need not have quarreled—the repast was plentiful for all. Between forty and fifty carcasses were strewn over the ground, which Don Juan and his vaqueros, as they drew near, recognized as the carcasses of his own cattle!

"I told you so, Don Juan," said Carlos, in a voice now husky with emotion, "but I did not expect this. What a deep laid plan! They might have strayed back! and that—oh, horrible villain! My mother was right—it is he! it is he!"

"Who, Carlos? What mean you?" inquired Don Juan, wondering at these strange and incongruous phrases.

"Ask me not now, Don Juan! Presently I shall tell you all—presently, but not now; my brain's too hot, my heart is burning; presently, presently. The mystery is past—I know all—I had suspicion from the first—I saw him at the fiesta—I saw his bad ruffian gaze bent upon her. Oh, despot! I'll tear your heart out! Come, Don Juan! Antonio! comrades! After me on the trail! It's easily followed. I know where it will lead—well I know. On!"

And driving the spur into the flanks of his horse, the cibolero galloped off in the direction of the crossing.

The wondering troop—Don Juan among the rest—set their animals in motion, and galloped after.

There was no halt made at the ford. Carlos dashed his horse through the water, and the rest imitated his example. There was no halt either on arriving at the trace that led northward. The dog scampered along it, yelping at intervals; and the troop kept close after his heels.

They had not followed it quite a mile when it suddenly turned at right angles, and took the direction of the town!

Don Juan and the rest expressed surprise, but there was nothing in all this to surprise the cibolero. He was expecting that. The expression of his face was not that of astonishment. It was far different—far more terrible to behold!

His eyes were sunk in their sockets and gleaming with a lurid light, as if fire were burning within them. His teeth were firmly set—his lips white and tightly drawn, as if he was meditating, or had already made, some desperate resolve. He scarce looked at the tracks; he needed their guidance no longer. He knew where he was going.

The trail crossed a muddy arroyo. The dog sweltered through, and the red clay adhered to his shaggy coat. It corresponded with that with which he had already been besmeared!

Don Juan noticed the circumstance and pointed it out.

"He has been here before," said he.

"I know it," replied Carlos; "I know it all—all. There is no mystery now. Patience, amigo! You shall know all, but now let me think. I have no time for aught else."

The trail still led in the direction of the town. It did not re-enter the valley, but passed over a sloping country to the upper plain, and then ran nearly parallel with the bluffs.

"Master," said Antonio, riding up by the side of Carlos, "these are not the tracks of Indian horses, unless they have stolen them. Two of them are troop horses. I know the *herradura* well. They are officers' horses, too. I can tell that from the shoeing."

The cibolero showed no signs of being astonished at this information, nor made he reply. He seemed engrossed with his thoughts.

Antonio, thinking he had not been heard or understood, repeated what he had said.

"Good Antonio!" said the cibolero, turning his eyes on his follower, "do you think me blind or stupid?"

This was not said angrily. Antonio understood its meaning and fell back among his companions.

On moved the trackers—now at a gallop, now more slowly, for their animals were by this time somewhat jaded. On they moved, still keeping the trail, and still heading straight for the town!

At length they reached a point where a road from the upper plain led by a zigzag path to the valley below. It was the same by which Carlos had ascended to perform his great feat on the day of the fiesta. At the top of the descent Carlos ordered the party to halt, and with Don Juan rode forward to the edge of the projecting cliff—at the very spot where he had exhibited his skill—the cliff of *Nina Perdida*.

Both drew up when near the edge. They commanded a full view of the valley and the town.

"Do you see that building?" inquired the cibolero, pointing to the detached pile which lay between them and the town.

"The Presidio?"

"The Presidio."

"Yes—what of it?"

"She is there!"

CHAPTER XIV.

At that moment upon the *azotea* a man was pacing to and fro. He was not a sentinel, though at opposite angles of the building two of these could be seen who carried carbines—their leads and shoulders just appearing above the crenated top of the battlement towers.

The man *en promenade* was an officer, and the part of the *azotea* upon which he moved was the roof of the officers' quarter, separated from the rest by a wall of equal height with the parapet. It was, moreover, a sacred precinct—not to be disturbed by the tread of common troopers on ordinary occasions. It was the "quarter-deck" of the Presidio.

The officer was in full dress, though not on any duty; but a single glance at the style and cut of his uniform would convince any one that he was a "dandy soldier," and loved to appear at all times in fine feathers. The gold lace and bright-colored broad-cloth seemed to affect him as his rich plumage does the peacock. Every now and again he paused in his promenade, glanced down at his lacquered boots, examined the tournure of his limbs, or feasted his eyes upon the jewels that studded his delicate white fingers.

He was no beauty withal nor hero either; but that did not prevent him from indulging in the fancy that he was both—a combination of Mars and Apollo.

He was a colonel in the Spanish army, however, and Comandante of the Presidio—for the promenader in question was Vizcarra himself. Though satisfied with his own appearance, he was evidently not satisfied about something else. There was a cloud upon his features that not even the contemplation of the lacquered boots or lily-white hands could banish. Some disagreeable thought was pressing upon his mind, causing him at intervals to make fitful starts, and look nervously around him.

"Bah! 'twas but a dream!" he muttered to himself. "Why should I think of it? 'twas only a dream!"

His eyes were bent downward as he gave expression to these abrupt phrases, and as he raised them again chance guided his look in the direction of "La Nina Perdida." No, it was not chance, for La Nina had figured in his dream, and his eyes were but following his thoughts.

The moment they rested on the cliff he started back as if some terrible specter were before him, and mechanically caught hold of the parapet. His cheeks suddenly blanched, his jaws fell, and his chest heaved in hurried and convulsive breathing!

What can cause these symptoms of strong emotion? Is it the sight of yonder horseman standing upon the very pinnacle of the bluff, and outlined against the pale sky? What is there in such an appearance to terrify the comandante—for terrified he is! Hear him!

"My God! my God!—it is he! The form of his horse—of himself—just as he appeared—it is he! I fear to look at him! I cannot—"

And the officer averted his face for a moment, covering it with his hands.

It was but a moment, and again he looked upward. Not curiosity, but the fascination of fear, caused him to look again. The horseman had disappeared. Neither horse nor man—no object of any sort—broke the line of the bluffs!

"Surely I have been dreaming again?" muttered the still trembling caiff. "Surely I have? There was no one there, least of all—How could he? He is hundreds of miles off! It was an illusion! Ha! ha! ha! What the deuce is the matter with my senses, I wonder? That horrid dream of last night has bewitched them! *Carambo!* I'll think no more of it!"

As he said this he resumed his pace more briskly, believing that that might rid him of his unpleasant reflections. At every turn, however, his eyes again sought the bluff, and swept along its edge with a glance that betokened fear. But they saw no more of the specter horseman, and their owner began to feel at ease again.

A footstep was heard upon the stone steps of the "escalera." Some one was ascending to the roof.

The next moment the head and shoulders of a man were visible; and Captain Roblado stepped out upon the *azotea*.

The "buenos dias" that passed between him and Vizcarra showed that it was their first meeting for that day. In fact, neither had been long up; for the hour was not too late for fashionable sleepers. Roblado had just breakfasted, and come out on the *azotea* to enjoy his Havana.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed he, as he lighted the cigar, "what a droll masquerade it has been! 'Pon my soul! I can scarce get the paint off; and my voice, after such yelling, won't recover for a week! Ha! ha! Never was maiden wooed

and won in such a romantic, roundabout way. Shepherds attacked—sheep driven off and scattered to the winds—cattle carried away and killed in regular *battue*—old woman knocked over, and rancho given to the flames—besides three days of marching and countermarching, travestying Indian, and whooping at one is hoarse: and all this trouble for a poor *paisana*—daughter of a reputed witch! Ha! ha! ha! It would read like a chapter in some Eastern romance—Aladdin, for instance—only that the maiden was not rescued by some process of magic or knight errantry. Ha! ha! ha!"

This speech of Roblado will disclose what is, perhaps, guessed at already—that the late incursion of "los barbaros" was neither more nor less than an affair got up by Vizcarra and himself to cover the abduction of the cibolero's sister. The Indians who had harried the sheep and cattle—who had attacked the hacienda of Don Juan—who had fired the rancho and carried off Rosita—were Colonel Vizcarra, his officer Captain Roblado, his sergeant Gomez, and a soldier named Jose—another minion of his confidence and will.

There were but the four, as that number was deemed sufficient for the accomplishment of the atrocious deed; and rumor, backed by fear, gave them the strength of four hundred. Besides, the fewer in the secret the better. This was the prudence or cunning of Roblado.

Most cunningly, too, had they taken their measures. The game, from beginning to end, was played with design and execution worthy of a better cause. The shepherds were first attacked on the upper plain, to give certainty to the report that hostile Indians were near. The scouting-parties were sent out from the Presidio, and proclamations issued to the inhabitants to be on their guard—all for effect; and the further swoop upon the cattle was clear proof of the presence of "los barbaros" in the valley. In this foray the fiendish masquers took an opportunity of "killing two birds with one stone;" for, in addition to carrying out their general design, they gratified the mean revenge which they held against the young rancero.

Their slaughtering his cattle in the ravine had a double object. First, the loss it would be to him gave them satisfaction; but their principal motive was that the animals might not stray back to the settlement. Had they done so, after having been captured by Indians, it would have looked suspicious. As it was, they hoped that, long before any one should discover the *battue*, the wolves and buzzards would do their work; and the bones would only supply food for conjecture. This was the more probable, as it was not likely, while the Indian alarm lasted, that any one would be bold enough to venture that way. There was no settlement or road, except Indian trails, leading in that direction.

Even when the final step was taken, and the victim carried off, she was not brought directly to the Presidio; for even she was to be hoodwinked. On the contrary, she was tied upon a mule, led by one of the ruffians, and permitted to see the way they were going, until they had reached the point where their trail turned back. She was then blinded by a leathern "tapado," and in that state carried to the Presidio, and within its walls—utterly ignorant of the distance she had traveled and the place where she was finally permitted to rest.

Every act in the diabolical drama was conceived with astuteness and enacted with a precision which must do credit to the head of Captain Roblado, if not to his heart. He was the principal actor in the whole affair.

Vizcarra had, at first, some scruples about the affair—not on the score of conscience, but of impracticability and fear of detection. This would indeed have done him a serious injury. The discovery of such a villainous scheme would have spread like wildfire over the whole country. It would have been ruin to him.

Roblado's eloquence, combined with his own vile desires, overruled the slight opposition of his superior; and, once entered on the affair, the latter found himself highly amused in carrying it out. The burlesque proclamations, the exaggerated stories of Indians, the terror of the citizens, their encomiums on his own energetic and valorous conduct—all these were a pleasant relief to the ennui of a barrack life, and during the several days' visit of "los barbaros," the comandante and his captain were never without a theme for mirth and laughter.

So adroitly had they managed the whole matter that, upon the morning after the final coup of the robbers—the abduction of Rosita—there was not a soul in the settlement, themselves and their two aids excepted, that had the slightest suspicion but that real hostile Indians were the actors!

Yes, there was one other who had a suspicion—only a suspicion—Rosita's mother. Even the girl believed herself in the hands of Indians—if belief she had.

CHAPTER XV.

"Ha! ha! ha! A capital joke, by my honor!" continued Roblado, laughing as he puffed his cigar. "It's the only piece of fun I've enjoyed since we came to this stupid place. Even in a

frontier post I find that one *may* have a little amusement if he know how to make it. Ha! ha! ha! After all, there was a deuced deal of trouble. But come, tell me, my dear comandante—for you know by this time—in confidence, was it worth the trouble?”

“I am sorry we have taken it,” was the reply, delivered in a serious tone.

Roblado looked up in the other's face, and now for the first time noticed its gloomy expression. Busied with his cigar, he had not observed this before.

“Hola!” exclaimed he; “what's the matter, my colonel? This is not the look a man should wear who has spent the last twelve hours as pleasantly as you must have done. Something amiss?”

“Everything amiss.”

“Pray what? Surely you were with her?”

“But a moment, and that was enough.”

“Explain, my dear colonel.”

“She is mad!”

“Mad!”

“Raving mad! Her talk terrified me. I was but too glad to come away, and leave her to the care of Jose, who waits upon her. I could not bear to listen to her strange jabberings. I assure you, camarado, it robbed me of all desire to remain.”

“Oh,” said Roblado, “that's nothing—she'll get over it in a day or so. She still thinks herself in the hands of the savages, who are going to murder and scalp her! It may be as well for you to undeceive her of this as soon as she comes to her senses. I don't see any harm in letting her know. You must do so in the end, and the sooner the better—you will have the longer time to get her reconciled to it. Now that you have her snug within earless and eyeless walls, you can manage the thing at your leisure. No one suspects—no one *can* suspect. They are full of the Indians to-day—ha! ha! ha! and 'tis said her innamorato, Don Juan, talks of getting up a party to pursue them! Ha! ha! He'll not do that—the fellow hasn't influence enough, and nobody cares either about his cattle or the witch's daughter. Had it been some one else the case might have been different. As it is, there's no fear of discovery. Even were the cibolero himself to make his appearance—”

“Roblado!” cried the comandante, interrupting him, and speaking in a deep, earnest voice.

“Well?” inquired the captain, regarding Vizcarra with astonishment.

“I have had a dream—a fearful dream; and that—not the ravings of the girl—it is that is now troubling me. *Diablos!* a fearful dream!”

“You, comandante—a valiant soldier—to let a silly dream trouble you! But come, what is it? I'm a good interpreter of dreams. I warrant I read it to your better satisfaction.”

“Simple enough it is then. I thought myself upon the cliff of La Nina. I thought that I was alone with Carlos, the cibolero. I thought that he knew all, and that he had brought me there to punish me—to avenge her. I had no power to resist, but was led forward to the brink. I thought that we closed and struggled for awhile; but at length I was shaken from his grasp and pushed over the precipice! I felt myself falling—falling! I could see above me the cibolero, with his sister by his side, and on the extremest point the hideous witch, their mother, who laughed a wild, maniac laugh, and clapped her long, bony hands! I felt myself falling—falling—yet still not reaching the ground; and this horrible feeling continued for a long, long time—in fact, until the fearful thought awoke me. Even then I could scarce believe I had been dreaming, so palpable was the impression that remained. Oh, comrade, it was a dreadful dream!”

“And but a dream; and what signifies—?”

“Stay, Roblado! I have not told you all. Within the hour—ay, within the quarter of that time—while I was on this spot thinking over it, I chanced to look up to the cliff; and yonder, upon the extreme point, was a horseman clearly outlined against the sky—and that horseman the very image of the cibolero! I noted the horse and the seat of the rider, which I well remember. I could not trust my eyes to look at him. I averted them for a moment—only a moment; and when I looked again he was gone! So quickly had he retired that I was inclined to think it was only a fancy—that there had been none—and that my dream had produced the illusion!”

“That is likely enough,” said Roblado, desirous of comforting his companion; “likely enough—nothing more natural. In the first place, from where we stand to the top of La Nina is a good five thousand varas as the crow flies; and for you, at that distance, to distinguish Carlos the cibolero from any other horseman is a plain impossibility. In the second place, Carlos the cibolero is at this moment full five hundred miles from the tip of my cigar, risking his precious carcass for a cartload of stinking hides and a few bultos of dried buffalo-beef. Let us hope that some of his copper-colored friends will raise his bay-colored hair, which some of our poblanas so much admire. And now, my dear comandante, as to your dream, that is as natural as may be. It could hardly

be otherwise than that you should have such a dream. The remembrance of the cibolero's feat of horsemanship on that very cliff, and the later affair with the sister, together with the suspicion you may naturally entertain that Senor Carlos wouldn't be too kind to you if he knew all and had you in his power—all these things, being in your thoughts at one time, must come together incongruously in a dream. The old woman, too—if she wasn't in your thoughts, she has been in mine ever since I gave her that knock in the doorway. Who could forget such a picture as she then presented? Ha! ha! ha!”

The brutal villain laughed—not so much from any ludicrous recollection, as to make the whole thing appear light and trivial in the eyes of his companion.

“What does it all amount to?” he continued. “A dream! a simple, everyday dream! Come, my dear friend, don't let it remain on your mind for another instant!”

“I cannot help it, Roblado. It clings to me like my shadow. It feels like a presentiment. I wish I had left this paisana in her mud hut. By Heaven! I wish she were back there. I shall not be myself till I have got rid of her. I seem to loathe as much as I loved the jabbering idiot.”

“Tut, tut, man! you'll soon change your way of thinking—you'll soon take a fresh liking—”

“No, Roblado, no! I'm disgusted—I can't tell why; but I am. Would to God she were off my hands!”

“Oh! that's easy enough, and without hurting anybody. She can go the way she came. It will only be another scene in the masquerade, and no one will be the wiser. If you are really in earnest—”

“Roblado!” cried the comandante, grasping his captain by the arm, “I never was more in earnest in my life. Tell me the plan to get her back without making a noise about it. Tell me quick, for I cannot bear this horrid feeling any longer.”

“Why, then,” began Roblado, “we must have another travestie of Indians—we must—”

He was suddenly interrupted. A short, sharp groan escaped from Vizcarra. His eyes looked as though about to start from his head. His lips grew white, and the perspiration leaped into drops on his forehead!

What could it mean? Vizcarra stood by the outer edge of the azotea that commanded a view of the road leading up to the gate of the Presidio. He was gazing over the parapet, and pointing with outstretched arm.

Roblado was further back, near the center of the azotea. He sprang forward, and looked in the direction indicated. A horseman, covered with sweat and dust, was galloping up the road. He was near enough for Roblado to distinguish his features. Vizcarra had already distinguished them. It was Carlos the cibolero!

CHAPTER XVI.

THE announcement made by the cibolero on the bluff startled Don Juan, as if a shot had passed through him. Up to this time the simple ranchero had no thought but that they were on the trail of Indians. Even the singular fact of the trail leading back to the valley had not undeceived him. He supposed the Indians had made some other and later foray in that quarter, and that they would hear of them as soon as they should descend the cliffs.

When Carlos pointed to the Presidio, and said: “She is there!” he received the announcement at first with surprise, then with incredulity.

Another word from the cibolero, and a few moments' reflection, and his incredulity vanished. The terrible truth flashed upon his mind, for he, too, remembered the conduct of Vizcarra on the day of the fiesta. His visit to the rancho and other circumstances now rushed before him, aiding the conviction that Carlos spoke the truth.

For some moments the lover could scarce give utterance to his thoughts, so painful were they. More painful than ever! Even while under the belief that his mistress was in the hands of wild Indians he suffered less. There was still some hope that, by their strange code in relation to female captives, she might escape that dreaded fate, until he and Carlos might come up and rescue her. But now the time that had elapsed—Vizcarra's character—oh God! it was a terrible thought! and the young man reeled in his saddle as it crossed his mind.

He rode back a few paces, flung himself from his horse, and staggered to the ground in the bitterness of his anguish.

Carlos remained on the bluff, still gazing down on the Presidio. He seemed to be maturing some plan. He could see the sentries on the battlements, the troopers lounging around the walls in their dark blue and crimson uniforms. He could even hear the call of the cavalry bugle, as its clear echoes came dancing along the cliffs. He could see the figure of a man—an officer—pacing to and fro on the azotea, and he could perceive that the latter had halted, and was observing him.

It was at this very moment that Vizcarra

had caught sight of the horseman on the bluff—the sight that had so terrified him, and which indeed was no illusion.

“Can it be that fiend himself?” thought Carlos, regarding the officer for a moment. “Quite likely it is he. Oh! that he were within range of my rifle! Patience—patience! I will yet have my revenge!”

And as the speaker muttered these words, he reined back from the bluff and rejoined his companion.

A consultation was now held as to what would be the best mode of proceeding. Antonio was called to their council, and to him Carlos declared his belief that his sister was a captive within the Presidio. It was telling Antonio what he had already divined. The *mestizo* had been to the fiesta as well as his master, and his keen eyes had been busy on that day. He, too, had observed the conduct of Vizcarra; and long before their halt he had arrived at an elucidation of the many mysteries that marked the late Indian incursion. He knew all—his master might have saved words in telling him.

Neither words nor time were wasted. The hearts of both brother and lover were beating too hurriedly for that. Perhaps at that moment the object of their affection was in peril—perhaps struggling with her ruffian abductor! Their timely arrival might save her!

These considerations took precedence of all plans; in fact, there was no plan they could adopt. To remain concealed—to skulk about the place—to wait for opportunity—what opportunity? They might spend days in fruitless waiting. Days!—hours—even minutes would be too long. Not a moment was to be lost before some action must be taken.

And what action? They could think of none—none but open action. What! dare a man not claim his own sister? Demand her restoration?

But the thought of refusal—the thought of subterfuge—in fact, the certainty that such would be the result—quite terrified them both.

And yet how else could they act? They would at least give publicity to the atrocious deed; that might serve them. There would be sympathy in their favor—perhaps more. Perhaps the people, slaves as they were, might surround the Presidio, and clamor loudly—in some way the captive might be rescued. Such were their hurried reflections.

“If not rescued,” said Carlos, grinding his teeth together, “she shall be revenged. Though the *garrote* press my throat, he shall not live if she be dishonored. I swear it!”

“I echo the oath!” cried Don Juan, grasping the hilt of his *machete*.

“Masters! dear masters!” said Antonio, “you both know I am not a coward. I shall aid you with my arm or my life; but it is a terrible business. Let us have caution, or we fail. Let us be prudent!”

“True, we must be prudent. I have already promised that to my mother; but how, comrades!—how? In what does prudence consist?—to wait and watch, while she—oh!”

All three were silent for a while. None of them could think of a feasible plan to be pursued.

The situation was, indeed, a most difficult one. There was the Presidio, and within its walls—perhaps in some dark chamber—the cibolero well knew his sister was a captive; but under such peculiar circumstances that her release would be a most difficult enterprise.

In the first place, the villain who held her would assuredly deny that she was there. To have released her would have been an acknowledgment of his guilt. What proof of it could Carlos give? The soldiers of the garrison, no doubt, were ignorant of the whole transaction—with the exception of the two or three miscreants who had acted as aids. Were the cibolero to assert such a thing in the town he would be laughed at—no doubt arrested and punished. Even could he offer proofs, what authority was there to help him to justice? The military was the law of the place, and the little show of civic authority that existed would be more disposed to take sides against him than in his favor. He could expect no justice from any quarter. All the proof of his accusation would rest only on such facts as would neither be understood nor regarded by those to whom he might appeal. The return trail would be easily accounted for by Vizcarra—if he should deign to take so much trouble—and the accusation of Carlos would be scouted as the fancy of a madman. No one would give credence to it. The very atrociousness of the deed rendered it incredible!

Carlos and his companions were aware of all these things. They had no hope of help from any quarter. There was no authority that could give them aid or redress.

The cibolero, who had remained for awhile silent and thoughtful, at length spoke out. His tone was altered. He seemed to have conceived some plan that held out a hope.

“Comrades!” he said, “I can think of nothing but an open demand, and that must be made within the hour. I cannot live another hour without attempting her rescue—another hour, and what we dread—No! within the hour it must be. I have formed a sort of plan—it may

not be the most prudent—but there is no time for reflection. Hear it!"

"Go on!"

"It will be of no use our appearing before the gate of the Presidio in full force. There are hundreds of soldiers within the walls, and our twenty Tagnos, though brave as lions, would be of no service in such an unequal fight. I shall go alone."

"Alone?"

"Yes; I trust to chance for an interview with him. If I can get that, it is all I want. He is her gaoler; and when the gaoler sleeps, the captive may be freed. He shall sleep then!"

The last words were uttered in a significant tone, while the speaker placed his hand mechanically upon the handle of a large knife that was stuck in his waist-belt.

"He shall sleep then!" he repeated; "and soon, if Fate favors me. For the rest I care not: I am too desperate. If she be dishonored I care not to live, but I shall have full revenge!"

"But how will you obtain an interview?" suggested Don Juan. "He will not give you one. Would it not be better to disguise yourself? There would be more chance of seeing him that way?"

"No; I am not easily disguised, with my light hair and skin. Besides, it would cost too much time. Trust me, I will not be rash. I have a plan by which I hope to get near him—to see him, at all events. If it fail, I intend to make no demonstration for the present. None of the wretches shall know my real errand. Afterward I may do as you advise, but now I cannot wait. I must on to the work. I believe it is he who is at this moment pacing yonder azotea, and that is why I cannot wait, Don Juan. If it be he—"

"But what shall we do?" asked Don Juan.

"Can we not assist in any way?"

"Yes, perhaps in my escape. Come on, I shall place you. Come on quickly. Moments are days. My brain's on fire. Come on!"

So saying, the cibolero leaped into his saddle and struck rapidly down the precipitous path that led to the valley.

From the point where the road touched the valley bottom, for more than a mile in the direction of the Presidio, it ran through a thick growth of low trees and bushes forming a "chaparral," difficult to pass through, except by following the road itself.

But there were several cattle-paths through the thicket, by which it might be traversed; and these were known to Antonio, the half-blood, who had formerly lived in this neighborhood. By one of these a party of mounted men might approach within half-a-mile of the Presidio without attracting the observation of the sentries upon the walls. To this point, then, Antonio was directed to guide the party; and in due time they arrived near the edge of the jungle, where, at the command of Carlos, all dismounted, keeping themselves and their horses under cover of the bushes.

"Now," said the cibolero, speaking to Don Juan, "remain here. If I escape, I shall gallop direct to this point. If I lose my horse, you shall see me afoot all the same. For such a short stretch I can run like a deer; I shall not be overtaken. When I return I shall tell you how to act."

"See! Don Juan!" he continued, grasping the rancho by the arm, and drawing him forward to the edge of the chaparral. "It is he! by Heaven, it is he!"

Carlos pointed to the azotea of the Presidio, where the head and shoulders of a man were seen above the line of the parapet.

"It is the comandante himself!" said Don Juan, also recognizing him.

"Enough! I have no time for more talk," cried the cibolero. "Now or never! If I return, you shall know what to do. If not, I am taken or killed. But stay here. Stay till late in the night; I may still escape. Their prisons are not too strong, besides, I carry this gold. It may help me. No more. Adios! true friend, adios!"

With a grasp of the rancho's hand, Carlos leaped back to his saddle, and rode off.

He did not go in the direction of the Presidio, as that would have discovered him too soon. But a path that led through the chaparral would bring him out on the main road that ran up to the front gate; and this path he took. Antonio guided him to the edge of the timber, and then returned to the rest.

Carlos, once on the road, spurred his horse into a gallop, and dashed boldly forward to the great gate of the Presidio. The dog Cibolo followed, keeping close up to the heels of his horse.

CHAPTER XVII.

"By the Virgin, it is he!" exclaimed Roblado, with a look of astonishment and alarm. "The fellow himself, as I live!"

"I knew it!—I knew it!" shrieked Vizcarra. "I saw him on the cliff: it was no vision!"

"Where can he have come from? In the name of all the saints, where has the fellow—"

"Roblado, I must go below! I must go in! I will not stay to meet him! I cannot!"

"Nay, colonel, better let him speak with us. He has seen and recognized you already. If you appear to shun him, it will arouse suspicion. He has come to ask our help to pursue the Indians, and that's his errand, I warrant you!"

"Do you think so?" inquired Vizcarra, partially recovering his self-possession at this conjecture.

"No doubt of it! What else? He can have no suspicion of the truth. How is it possible he could, unless he were a witch, like his mother? Stay where you are, and let us hear what he has got to say. Of course, you can talk to him from the azotea, while he remains below. If he shows any signs of being insolent, as he has already been to both of us, let us have him arrested, and cooled a few hours in the calabozo. I hope the fellow will give us an excuse for it, for I have not forgotten his impudence at the fiesta."

"You are right, Roblado; I will stay and hear him. It will be better, I think, and will allay any suspicion. But, as you say, he can have none!"

"On the contrary, by your giving him the aid he is about to ask you for, you may put him entirely off the scent—make him your friend, in fact. Ha! ha!"

The idea was plausible, and pleased Vizcarra. He at once determined to act upon it.

This conversation had been hurriedly carried on, and lasted but a few moments—from the time the approaching horseman had been first seen, until he drew up under the wall.

For the last two hundred yards he had ridden slowly, and with an air of apparent respect—as though he feared it might be deemed rude to approach the place of power by any swaggering exhibition of horsemanship. On his fine features traces of grief might be observed, but not one sign of the feeling that was at that moment uppermost in his heart.

As he drew near, he raised his sombrero in a respectful salute to the two officers, whose heads and shoulders were just visible over the parapet; and having arrived within a dozen paces of the wall, he reined up, and taking off his hat again, waited to be addressed.

"What is your business?" demanded Roblado.

"Cavalleros! I wish to speak with the comandante."

This was delivered in the tone of one who is about to ask a favor. It gave confidence to Vizcarra, as well as to the bolder villain—who, notwithstanding all his assurances to the contrary, had still some secret misgivings about the cibolero's errand. Now, however, it was clear that his first conjecture was correct; Carlos had come to solicit their assistance.

"I am he!" answered Vizcarra, now quite recovered from his fright. "I am the comandante. What have you to communicate, my man?"

"Your excellency, I have a favor to ask;" and the cibolero again saluted with an humble bow.

"I told you so," whispered Roblado, to his superior. "All safe, my colonel."

"Well, my good fellow," replied Vizcarra, in his usual haughty and patronizing manner, "let me hear it. If not unreasonable—"

"Your excellency, it is a very heavy favor I would ask, but I hope not unreasonable. I am sure that, if it do not interfere with your manifold duties, you will not refuse to grant it, as the interest and trouble you have already taken in the cause are but too well known."

"I told you so," muttered Roblado, a second time.

"Speak out, man!" said Vizcarra, encouragingly; "I can only give an answer when I have heard your request."

"It is this, your excellency. I am but a poor cibolero."

"You are Carlos the cibolero! I know you."

"Yes, your excellency, we have met—at the fiesta of San Juan—"

"Yes, yes! I recollect your splendid horsemanship."

"Your excellency is kind to call it so. It does not avail me now. I am in great trouble."

"What has befallen? Speak out, man!"

Both Vizcarra and Roblado guessed the purport of the cibolero's request. They desired that it should be heard by the few soldiers lounging about the gate, and for that reason they spoke in a loud tone themselves, anxious that their petitioner might do the same.

Not to oblige them, but for reasons of his own, Carlos replied in a loud voice. He, too, wished the soldiers, but more particularly the sentry at the gate, to hear what passed between him and the officers.

"Well, your excellency," replied he, "I live in a poor rancho, the last in the settlement, with my old mother and sister. The night before last it was attacked by a party of Indians—my mother left for dead—the rancho set on fire—and my sister carried off!"

"I have heard of all this, my friend—nay, more, I have myself been out in pursuit of the savages."

"I know it, your excellency. I was absent on the plains, and only returned last night. I

have heard that your excellency was prompt in pursuing the savages, and I feel grateful."

"No need of that; I only performed my duty. I regret the occurrence, and sympathize with you; but the villains have got clear off, and there is no hope of bringing them to punishment just now; perhaps some other time—when the garrison here is strengthened—I shall make an incursion into their country, and then your sister may be recovered."

So completely had Vizcarra been deceived by the cibolero's manner, that his confidence and coolness had returned, and any one knowing nothing more of the affair than could be gathered from that conversation would have certainly been deceived by him. This dissimulation both in speech and manner appeared perfect. By the keen eye of Carlos, however—with his knowledge of the true situation—the tremor of the speaker's lips, slight as it was—his uneasy glance—and an occasional hesitancy in his speech, were all observed. Though Carlos was deceiving him, he was not deceiving Carlos.

"What favor were you going to ask?" he inquired, after he had delivered his hopeful promise.

"This, your excellency; that you would allow your troops to go once more on the trail of the robbers, either under your own command—which I would much like—or one of your brave officers." Roblado felt flattered. "I would act as guide, your excellency. There is not a spot within two hundred miles I am not acquainted with, as well as I am with this valley; and, though I should not say it, I assure your excellency I can follow an Indian trail with any hunter on the plains. If your excellency will but send the troop, I promise you I shall guide them to the robbers, or lose my reputation. I can follow their trail wherever it may lead."

"Oh! you could, indeed?" said Vizcarra, exchanging a significant glance with Roblado, while both exhibited evident symptoms of uneasiness.

"Yes, your excellency, anywhere."

"It would be impossible," said Roblado. "It is now two days old; besides, we followed it beyond the Pecos, and we have no doubt the robbers are by this time far out of reach of any pursuit. It would be quite useless to attempt such a thing."

"Cavalleros!"—Carlos addressed himself to both—"I assure you I could find them. They are not so far off."

Both the comandante and his captain started, and visibly turned pale. The cibolero did not affect to notice this.

"Nonsense! my good fellow!" stammered Roblado; "they are—at least—hundreds of miles off by this—away over the Staked Plain—or to—to the mountains."

"Pardon me, captain, for differing with you; but I believe I know these Indians—I know to what tribe they belong."

"What tribe?" simultaneously inquired the officers, both with an earnestness of manner and a slight trepidation in their voices; "what tribe? Were they not Yutas?"

"No," answered the cibolero, while he observed the continued confusion of his questioners.

"Who, then?"

"I believe," replied Carlos, "they were not Yutas—more likely my sworn foes, the Jicarillas."

"Quite possible!" assented both, in a breath, and evidently relieved at the enunciation.

"Quite possible!" repeated Roblado. "From the description given us by the people who saw them, we had fancied that they were the Yutas. It may be a mistake, however. The people were so affrighted, they could tell but little about them. Besides, the Indians were only seen in the night."

"Why think you they are the Jicarillas?" asked the comandante, once more breathing freely.

"Partly because there were so few of them," replied Carlos. "Had they been Yutas—"

"But they were not so few. The shepherds report a large band. They have carried off immense numbers of cattle. There must have been a considerable force of them, else they would not have ventured into the valley—that is certain."

"I am convinced, your excellency, there could not have been many. A small troop of your brave soldiers would be enough to bring back both them and their booty."

Here the lounging lanzeros erected their dwarfish bodies, and endeavored to look taller.

"If they were Jicarillas," continued Carlos, "I should not need to follow their trail. They are not in the direction of the Llano. If they have gone that way, it was to mislead you in pursuit. I know where they are at this moment—in the mountains."

"Hail you think they are in the mountains?"

"I am sure of it; and not fifty miles from here. If your excellency would but send a troop, I could guide it direct to the spot, and without following the trail they have taken out of the valley—which I believe was only a false one."

The comandante and Roblado drew back from the parapet, and for some minutes talked together in a low tone.

"It would look well," muttered Roblado; "in fact, the very thing you want. The trump cards seem to drop right into your hands. You send a force at the request of this fellow, who is a nobody here. You do him a service, and yourself at the same time. It will tell well, I warrant you."

"But for him to act as guide?"

"Let him. So much the better—that will satisfy all parties. He won't find his Jicarillas, —ha! ha! ha!—of course; but let the fool have his whim!"

"But suppose, camarado, he falls upon our trail?—the cattle?"

"He is not going in that direction; besides, if he did, we are not bound to follow such trails as he may choose for us; but he has said he is not going that way—he don't intend to follow a trail. He knows some nest of these Jicarillas in the mountains—like enough; and to rout them—there's a bit of glory for some one. A few scalps would look well over the gate. It hasn't had a fresh ornament of that sort since we've been here! What say you? It's but a fifty-mile ride."

"I have no objection to the thing—it would look well; but I shall not go myself. I don't like being along with the fellow out there or anywhere else—you can understand that feeling, I suppose?"

Here the comandante looked significantly at his companion.

"Oh! certainly—certainly," replied the latter.

"You may take the troop; or, if you are not inclined, send Garcia or the sergeant with them."

"I'll go myself," replied Roblado. "It will be safer. Should the cibolero incline to follow certain trails, I can lead him away from them, or refuse—yes, it will be better for me to go myself. By my soul! I want to have a brush with these red-skins. I hope to bring back some 'hair,' as they say. Ha! ha! ha!"

"When would you start?"

"Instantly—the sooner the better. That will be more agreeable to all parties, and will prove our promptitude and patriotism. Ha! ha! ha!"

"You had better give the sergeant his orders to get the men ready, while I make our cibolero happy."

Roblado hastened down from the azotea, and the next moment the bugle was heard sounding "boots and saddles."

CHAPTER XVIII.

DURING the conversation that had taken place the cibolero sat motionless upon his horse where he had first halted. The two officers were no longer in view, as they had stepped back upon the azotea, and the high parapet concealed them. But Carlos guessed the object of their temporary retirement, and waited patiently.

The group of soldiers, lounging in the gateway, and scanning him and his horse, now amounted to thirty or forty men; but the bugle, sounding the well-known call, summoned them off to the stables, and the sentry alone remained by the gate. Both he and the soldiers, having overheard the late conversation, guessed the object of the summons. Carlos felt assured that his request was about to be granted, though as yet the comandante had not told him.

Up to that moment the cibolero had conceived no fixed plan of action. How could he, where so much depended on chance?

Only one idea was before his mind that could be called definite—that was to get Vizcarra alone. If but for a single minute, it would suffice.

Entreaty, he felt, would be idle, and might waste time and end in his own defeat and death. A minute would be enough for vengeance; and with the thoughts of his sister's ruin fresh on his mind, he was burning for this. To anything after he scarce gave a thought. For escape, he trusted to chance and his own superior energy.

Up to that moment, then, he had conceived no fixed plan of action. It had just occurred to him that the comandante himself might lead the party going out. If so he would take no immediate step. While acting as guide, his opportunity would be excellent—not only for destroying his enemy, but for his own escape. Once on the wide plains, he would have no fear of ten times the number of lancers. His true steed would carry him far beyond their reach.

The troop was going. The bugle told him so. Would Vizcarra go with it? That was the question that now engrossed his thoughts, as he sat immobile on his horse, regarding with anxious look the line of the parapet above.

Once more the hated face appeared over the wall—this time to announce what the comandante believed would be glad news to his wretched petitioner. With all the pompous importance of one who grants a great favor he announced it.

A gleam of joy shot over the features of the cibolero—not at the announcement, though Vizcarra thought so; but at his observation of

the fact that the latter seemed to be now alone upon the azotea. Roblado's face was not above the wall.

"It is exceedingly gracious of your excellency to grant this favor to an humble individual like myself. I know not how to thank you."

"No thanks—no thanks; an officer of his Catholic Majesty wants no thanks for doing his duty."

As the comandante said this, he waved his hand with proud dignity, and seemed about to retire backward. Carlos interrupted his intention by putting a question: "Am I to have the honor of acting as guide to your excellency?"

"No; I do not go myself on this expedition; but my best officer, Captain Roblado, will lead it. He is now getting ready. You may wait for him."

As Vizcarra said this, he turned abruptly away from the wall, and continued his promenade along the azotea. No doubt he felt ill at ease in a *tete-a-tete* with the cibolero, and was glad to end it. Why he had condescended to give all this information need not be inquired into; but it was just what the cibolero desired to know.

The latter saw that the time was come—not a moment was to be lost, and, quick as thought, he resolved himself for action.

Up to this moment he had remained in his saddle. His rifle—its butt resting in the stirrup, its barrel extending up to his shoulder—had been seen by no one. The "*armas de agua*" covering his legs, and the serape his shoulders, had completely concealed it. In addition to this, his sharp hunting-knife, strapped along his left thigh, escaped observation under the hanging corner of the serape. These were his only weapons.

During the short conversation between the comandante and Roblado he had not been idle, though apparently so. He had made a full reconnaissance of the walls. He saw that out of the saguan, or gateway, an escalera of stone steps led up to the azotea. This communication was intended for the soldiers, when any duty required them to mount to the roof; but Carlos knew that there was another escalera, by which the officers ascended; and although he had never been inside the Presidio, he rightly conjectured that this was at the adjacent end of the building. He had observed, too, that but one sentry was posted at the gate, and that the stone banquette, inside the saguan, used as a lounging-place by the guard, was at the moment unoccupied. The guard were either inside the house, or had strayed away to their quarters. In fact, the discipline of the place was of the loosest kind. Vizcarra, though a dandy himself, was no martinet with his men. His time was too much taken up with his own pleasures to allow him to care for aught else.

All these points had passed under the keen observation of the cibolero before Vizcarra returned to announce his intention of sending the troop. He had scarce parted out of sight the second time ere the former had taken his measures.

Silently dismounting from his horse, Carlos left the animal standing where he had halted him. He did not fasten him to either rail or post, but simply hooked the bridle-rein over the "horn" of the saddle. He knew that his well-trained steed would await him there.

His rifle he carried under his serape, though the butt was now visible below the edge, pressed closely against the calf of his leg. In this way he walked forward to the gate.

One doubt troubled him—would the sentry permit him to pass in? If not the sentry must die!

This resolve was quickly made; and the cibolero under his serape kept his grasp on the handle of his hunting knife as he approached the gate.

The attempt was made to pass through. Fortunately for Carlos, and for the sentry as well, it was successful. The latter—a slouching careless fellow—had heard the late conversation, and had no suspicion of the other's design. He made some feeble opposition, notwithstanding; but Carlos hastily replied that he had something to say to the comandante, who had beckoned him up to the azotea. This but half satisfied the fellow, who, however, reluctantly allowed him to pass.

Once inside, Carlos sprung to the steps, and glided up with the stealthy silent tread of a cat. So little noise had his moccasins made upon the stones, that, when he arrived upon the roof, its occupant—although standing but six feet from the head of the escalera—was not aware of his presence!

There was he—Vizcarra himself—the despot—the spoiler—the violator of a sister's innocence and honor—there was he within six feet of the avenging brother—six feet from the muzzle of his ready rifle, and still ignorant of the terrible situation! His face was turned in an opposite direction—he saw not his peril.

The glance of the cibolero rested upon him but an instant, and then swept the walls to ascertain if any one was above. He knew there were two sentries on the towers. They were not visible—they were on the outer walls and could not be seen from Carlos's position. No one

else was above. His enemy alone was there, and his glance again rested upon him.

Carlos could have sent the bullet into his back, and such a thought crossed his mind, but was gone in an instant. He had come to take the man's life, but not in that manner. Even prudence suggested a better plan. His knife would be more silent, and afford him a better chance of escape when the deed was done!

With this idea, he brought the butt of his rifle gently to the ground, and rested its barrel against the parapet. The iron coming in contact with the stone wall gave a tiny clink. Slight as it was, it reached the ear of the comandante, who wheeled suddenly round, and started at the sight of the intruder.

At first he exhibited anger, but the countenance of the cibolero, that had undergone a complete metamorphosis during the short interval, soon changed his anger into alarm.

"How dare you intrude, sir?—how dare—"

"Not so loud, colonel!—not so loud—you will be heard."

The low husky voice, and the firm tone of command, in which they were uttered, terrified the cowardly wretch to whom these words were addressed. He saw that the man who stood before him bore in his face and attitude the expression of desperate and irresistible resolve, that plainly said, "Disobey, and you are a dead man!"

This expression was heightened by the gleaming blade of a long knife, whose haft was firmly grasped by the hand of the cibolero.

At sight of these demonstrations Vizcarra turned white with terror. He now comprehended what was meant. The asking for the troop had been but a subterfuge to get near his own person! The cibolero had tracked him; his guilt was known, and the brother was now come to demand redress or have vengeance! The horrors of his night-dream returned, now mingling with the horrors of the fearful reality before him.

He scarce knew what to say—he could scarce speak. He looked wildly around in hopes of seeing some help. Not a face or form was in sight—nothing but the gray walls, and before him the frowning face of his terrible antagonist. He would have called for help; but that face, that angry attitude, told him that the shout would be his last. He gasped out at length:

"What want you?"

"I want my sister!"

"Your sister?"

"My sister!"

"Carlos—I know not—she is not here—I—"

"Liar! she is within these walls. See! yonder the dog howls by the door. Why is that?"

Carlos pointed to a door in the lower part of the building, where the dog Cibolo was at that moment seen, whining and making other demonstrations, as if he wanted to get inside! A soldier was endeavoring to drive him off.

Vizcarra looked mechanically as directed. He saw the dog. He saw the soldier, too; but dared not make a signal to him. The keen blade was gleaming before his eyes. The question of the cibolero was repeated:

"Why is that?"

"I—I—know not—"

"Liar again! She has gone in by that door. Where is she now? Quick, tell me!"

"I declare, I know not. Believe me—"

"False villain! she is here. I have tracked you through all your paths; your tricks have not served you. Deny her once more, and this to your heart. She is here! Where—where—I say?"

"Oh, do not murder me! I shall tell all. She—she—is—here. I swear I have not wronged her; I swear I have not—"

"Here, ruffian, stand at this point, close to the wall here. Quick!"

The cibolero had indicated a spot from which part of the patio, or court-yard, was visible. His command was instantly obeyed, for the craven comandante saw that certain death was the alternative.

"Now give orders that she be brought forth! You know to whom she is intrusted. Be cool and calm, do you hear? Any sign to your minions, either word or gesture, and this knife will pass through your ribs! Now!"

"Oh, my God! my God! it would ruin me! All would know! Ruin! ruin! I pray you, have mercy, have patience! She shall be restored to you—I swear it—this very night!"

"This very moment, villain! Quick! proceed! call those who know! Let her be brought forth! Quick! I am on fire! One moment more—"

"Oh Heaven! you will murder me—a moment—Stay!—Ha!"

The last exclamation was in a different tone from the rest. It was a shout of exultation—of triumph!

The face of the comandante was turned toward the escalera by which Carlos had ascended, while that of the latter looked in the opposite direction. Carlos, therefore, did not perceive that a third person had reached the roof, until he felt his upraised right arm grasped by a strong hand, and held back! He wrenched his arm free—turning as he did so—when he found

himself face to face with a man whom he recognized as the Lieutenant Garcia.

"I have no quarrel with you," cried the cibolero; "keep away from me."

The officer, without saying a word, had drawn a pistol, and was leveling it at his head. Carlos rushed upon him.

The report rung, and for a moment the smoke shrouded both Garcia and the cibolero. One was heard to fall heavily on the tiles, and the next moment the other sprang from the cloud evidently unhurt.

It was the cibolero who came forth; and his knife, still in his grasp, was reeking with blood!

He rushed forward toward the spot where he had parted with the comandante, but the latter was gone! He was some distance off on the azotea, and running toward the private stairway.

Carlos saw at a glance he could not overtake him before he should reach the escalera, and make his descent; and to follow him below would now be useless; for the shot had given the alarm.

It was a moment of despair—a short moment: for in the next a bright thought rushed into the mind of the cibolero—he remembered his rifle. There might be still time to overtake the comandante with that!

He seized the weapon, and, springing beyond the circle of smoke, raised it to his shoulder.

Vizcarra had reached the stairway, and was already sinking into its trap-like entrance. His head and shoulders alone appeared above the line of wall, when some half-involuntary thought induced him to stop and look back. The coward had partly got over his fright now that he had arrived within reach of succor, and he glanced back from a feeling of curiosity, to see if the struggle between Garcia and the cibolero was yet over. He meant to stop only for an instant, but just as he turned his head the rifle cracked, and the bullet sent him tumbling to the bottom of the escalera!

The cibolero saw that his shot had taken effect—he saw, moreover, that the other was dead—he heard the wild shouts of vengeance from below; and he knew that unless he could escape by flight he would be surrounded and pierced by a hundred lances.

His first thought was to descend by the escalera, up which he had come. The other way only led into the patio, already filling with men.

He leaped over the body of Garcia, and ran toward the stairway.

A crowd of armed men was coming up. His escape was cut off!

Again he crossed the dead body, and, running along the azotea, sprang upon the outer parapet and looked below.

It was a fearful leap to take, but there was no other hope of escaping. Several lancers had reached the roof, and were charging forward with their pointed weapons. Already carbines were ringing, and bullets whistling about his ears. It was no time to hesitate. His eye fell upon his brave horse, as he stood proudly curving his neck and champing the bit. "Thank Heaven, he is yet alive!"

Nerved by the sight, Carlos dropped down from the wall, and reached the ground without injury.

A shrill whistle brought his steed to his side, and the next moment the cibolero had sprang into the saddle, and was galloping out into the open plain!

Bullets hissed after, and men mounted in hot pursuit; but before they could spur their horses out of the gateway, Carlos had reached the edge of the chaparral, and disappeared under the leafy screen of its thick foliage.

A body of lancers, with Roblado and Gomez at their head, rode after. As they approached the edge of the chaparral, to their astonishment a score of heads appeared above the bushes, and a wild yell hailed their advance!

"Indios bravos! los barbaros!" cried the lancers, halting, while some of them wheeled back in alarm. A general halt was made, and the pursuers waited until reinforcements should come up. The whole garrison turned out, and the chaparral was surrounded, and at length entered. But no Indians could be found, though the tracks of their animals led through the thicket in every direction.

After beating about for several hours, Roblado and his troopers returned to the Presidio.

CHAPTER XIX.

GARCIA was dead. Vizcarra was not, though, when taken up from where he had fallen, he looked like one who had not long to live, and behaved like one who was afraid to die. His face was covered with blood, and his cheek showed the scar of a shot. He was alive, however—moaning and mumbling. Fine talking was out of the question, for several of his teeth had been carried away by the bullet.

His wound was a mere face wound. There was not the slightest danger; but the "medico" of the place, a young practitioner, was not sufficiently master of his art to give him that assurance, and for some hours Vizcarra remained in anything but blissful ignorance of his fate.

The garrison doctor had died but a short time before, and his place was not yet supplied.

A scene of excitement for the rest of that day was the Presidio—not less so the town. The whole settlement was roused by the astounding news, which spread like a prairie fire throughout the length and breadth of the valley.

It traveled in two different shapes. One was, that the settlement was surrounded by "los barbaros," headed by Carlos the cibolero; that they must be in great numbers, since they had made an open attack upon the military stronghold itself; but that they had been beaten off by the valiant soldiers after a desperate conflict, in which many were killed on both sides; that the officers were all killed, including the comandante; and that another attack might be looked for that night, which would most likely be directed against the town! This was the first shape of the "novedades."

Another rumor had it that the "Indios mansos" had revolted; that they were headed by Carlos, the cibolero; that they had made an unsuccessful attempt upon the Presidio, in which, as before, the valiant soldiers had repulsed them, with great loss on both sides, including the comandante and his officers; that this was but the first outbreak of a great conspiracy, which extended to all the Tagnos of the settlement, and that no doubt the attack would be renewed that night!

To those who reflected, both forms of the rumor were incomprehensible. Why should "Indios bravos" attack the Presidio before proceeding against the more defenseless town, as well as the several rich haciendas? And how could Carlos, the cibolero, be their leader? Why should he of all men—he who had just suffered at the hands of the savages? It was well known through the settlement that it was the cibolero's sister who had been carried off. The idea of an Indian incursion, with him at the head of it, seemed too improbable.

Then, again, as to the conspiracy and revolt. Why, the tame Indians were seen laboring quietly in the fields, and those belonging to the mission were working at their usual occupations! News, too, had come down from the mines—no symptoms of conspiracy had been observed there! A revolt of the Tagnos, with the cibolero at their head, would, of the two rumors, have been the more likely to be true; for it was well known to all that these were far from content with their lot—but at present there was no appearance of such a thing around. There were they all at their ordinary employments. Who, then, were the revolted? Both rumors, therefore, were highly improbable.

Half the townpeople were soon gathered around the Presidio, and after stories of all shapes had been carried back and forward, the definite facts at length became known.

These, however, were as mysterious and puzzling as the rumors. For what reason could the cibolero have attacked the officers of the garrison? Who were the Indians that accompanied him? Were they "bravos" or "mansos"—savages or rebels?

The most remarkable thing was that the soldiers themselves who had taken part in the imaginary "fight" could not answer these questions. Some said this, and some that. Many had heard the conversation between Carlos and the officers; but that portion of the affair, though perfectly natural in itself, when taken in connection with after circumstances only rendered the whole more complicated and mysterious! The soldiers could give no explanation, and the people returned home, to canvass and discuss the affair among themselves. Various versions were in vogue. Some believed that the cibolero had come with the *bona fide* desire to obtain help against the Indians—that those who accompanied him were only a few Tagnos whom he had collected to aid in the pursuit—and that the comandante, having first promised to aid him, had afterward refused, and that this had led to the strange conduct of the cibolero!

There was another hypothesis that gained more credit than this. It was that Captain Roblado was the man whom the cibolero had desired to make a victim; that he was guided against him by motives of jealousy; for the conduct of Carlos on that day of the fiesta was well known, and had been much ridiculed—that, in failing to reach Roblado, he had quarreled with the comandante, and so forth.

Improbable as was this conjecture, it had many supporters, in the absence of the true motive for the conduct of the cibolero. There were but four men within the Presidio to whom this was known, and only three outside of it. By the general public it was not even suspected.

In one thing all agreed—in condemning Carlos the cibolero. The garrote was too good for him; and when taken, they could all promise him ample punishment. The very ingratitude of the act was magnified. It was but the day before that these same officers had gone forth with their valiant soldiers to do him a service! The man must have been mad! His mother had no doubt bewitched him.

To have killed Lieutenant Garcia!—he who was such a favorite! *Carrambo!*

This was true. Garcia was liked by the people of the settlement—perhaps not so much from the possession of any peculiar virtues, but in contrast with his superiors. He was an affable, harmless sort of person, and had won general esteem.

That night the cibolero had not one friend in San Ildefonso. Nay, we speak wrongly. He had one. There was one heart beating for him as fondly as ever—Catalina's—but she, too, was ignorant of the motives which had led to his mysterious conduct.

Whatever these motives were, she knew they could not be otherwise than just. What to her were the calumnies—the gibes—that were heaped upon him? What to her if he had taken the life of a fellow-creature? He had not done so without good cause—without some fearful provocation. She believed that in her soul. She knew his noble nature too well to think otherwise. He was the lord of her heart, and could do no wrong!

Sorrowful, heart-breaking news was it to her. It boded long separation—perhaps forever! He dared no more visit the town—not even the settlement! He would be driven to the wild plains—hunted like a wild wolf or the savage bison—perhaps taken and slain! Bitter were her reflections. When should she see him again? Maybe, never!

CHAPTER XX.

DURING all this time Vizcarra lay groaning upon his couch—not so much with pain as fear, for the fear of death still haunted him. But for that, his rage would have been boundless; but this passion was in abeyance—eclipsed by the terrors that flitted across his conscience.

Even had he been assured of recovery he would still have been in dread. His imagination was diseased by his dream and the after reality. Even surrounded by his soldiers, he feared the cibolero, who appeared able to accomplish any deed and escape its consequences. He did not even feel secure there in his chamber, with guards at the entrance, against that avenging arm!

Now, more than ever, he was desirous of getting rid of the cause—more than ever anxious that she should be got rid of; but he reflected that now more than ever was that a delicate and difficult matter. It would undoubtedly get abroad why the cibolero had made such a desperate attempt upon his life—it would spread until it reached high quarters—such a report could not be passed over—an investigation might be ordered; and that, unless he could destroy every trace of suspicion, might be his ruin.

These were his reflections while in the belief that he was going to recover; when a doubt of this crossed his mind he grew still more anxious about the result.

Roblado had hinted at a way in which all might be arranged. He waited with impatience for the latter to make his appearance. The warlike captain was still engaged in beating the chaparral; but Gomez had come in and reported that he was about to give up the search and return to the Presidio.

To Roblado the occurrences of the day had been rather pleasant than otherwise; and a close observer of his conduct could have told this. If there was anything in the whole business that really annoyed him it was the wound of the comandante—it was not fatal! Roblado, more experienced than the surgeon, knew this well. The friendship that existed between the two was a fellow-feeling in wickedness—a sort of felon's bond—durable enough so long as there was no benefit to either in breaking it. But this friendship did not prevent Roblado from regretting with all his heart that the bullet had not hit his friend a little higher up or a little lower down—either in the skull or the throat! He entertained this regret from no malice or ill-will toward the comandante, but simply from a desire to benefit himself. It was long since Roblado had been dreaming of promotion. He was not too humble to hope he might one day command the Presidio himself. Vizcarra's death would have given him that station at once; but Vizcarra was not to die just then, and this knowledge somewhat clouded the joy he was then experiencing.

And it was joy. Garcia and he had been enemies. There had been jealousy and ill-will between them for long; therefore the lieutenant's death was no source of regret to him. But the joy of Roblado owed partly its origin to another consequence of that day's drama—one that affected him more than any—one that was nearest his heart and his hopes.

Absurd as appeared the pretensions of the cibolero in regard to Catalina, Roblado had learned enough of late to make him jealous—ay, even to give him real uneasiness. She was a strange creature, Catalina de Cruces—one who had shown proofs of a rare spirit—one not to be bought and sold like a *bullo* of goods. She had taught both her father and Roblado a lesson of late. She had taught them that. She had struck the ground with her little foot, and threatened a convent—the grave—if too rudely

pressed! She had not rejected Roblado—that is, in word; but she insisted on having *her own time to make answer*; and Don Ambrosio was compelled to concede the point.

Under such circumstances her suitor felt uneasy. Not so much that he was jealous—though he did love her after his own fashion, and was piqued at the thought of such a rival—but he feared that spirit of hers, and dreaded that her splendid fortune might yet escape him. Such a woman was capable of the wildest resolve. She *might* take to a convent; or maybe to the plains with this base-born cibolero! Such an event in the life of such a woman would be neither impossible nor unlikely. In either case she could not take her fortune with her; but what mattered? it would not remain with him, Roblado.

The conduct of the cibolero had removed all obstacles, so far as he was concerned. There was no longer any dread of rivalry from that source. His life was now forfeited. Not only would he be cut off from all communication with her, but he would not dare to show himself in the settlement. A constant vigilance would be kept on foot to guard against that, and Roblado even promised himself the enjoyment of rare sport in hunting down his rival, and becoming at the same time his captor and executioner.

These were the ideas that crossed the mind of the savage captain, and that made him feel satisfied with the events of the day.

After scouring the chaparral, and following the track of the supposed Indians to the ceja of the table plain, he returned with his men to the Presidio, to make preparations for a more prolonged pursuit.

CHAPTER XXI.

ROBLADO'S arrival brought relief to Vizcarra, as he lay chafing and fretting.

Their conversation was, of course, upon the late occurrence, and Roblado gave his account of the pursuit.

"And do you really think," inquired the comandante, "that the fellow had a party of savages with him?"

"No," answered Roblado. "I did think so at first—that is, the men thought so, and I was deceived by their reports. I am now convinced they were not Indian bravos, but some of those Tagno friends of his; for it appears the padre was right—he has a suspicious connexion. That of itself might have been sufficient cause for us to have arrested him long ago; but now we need no cause. He is ours, when we can catch him."

"How do you propose to act?"

"Why, I have no doubt he will lead us a long chase. We must do the best we can to follow his trail. I came back to provision the men so that we can keep on for a sufficient time. The rascals have gone out of the valley by the upper pass, and perhaps have taken to the mountains. So thinks Gomez. We shall have to follow, and endeavor to overtake them. We must send express to the other settlements, so that the cibolero may be captured if he make his appearance in any of them. I don't think he will attempt that."

"Why?"

"Why! because it appears the old witch is still alive! and, moreover, he will hang around here so long as he has any hopes of recovering the sister."

"Ha! you are right; he will do so. He will never leave me till she—"

"So much the better; we shall have all the finer opportunity of laying hands on him, which, believe me, my dear colonel, will be no easy matter. The fellow will be watchful as a wolf, and on that superb horse of his can escape from our whole troop. We'll have to capture him by some stratagem."

"Can you think of none?"

"I have been thinking of one."

"What?"

"Why, it is simply this—in the first place, for the reasons I have given, the fellow will hang around the settlement. He may visit now and then the old *hechicera*, but not often. The other would be a better decoy."

"You mean her?" Vizcarra indicated the direction of the room in which Rosita was confined.

"I do. He is said to be foolishly fond of this sister. Now, were she in a place where he could visit her, I'll warrant he would come there; and then we could trap him at our pleasure."

"In a place!—where?" eagerly demanded Vizcarra.

"Why, back to her own neighborhood. They'll find some residence. If you will consent to let her go for a while, you can easily recover her—the more easily when we have settled with him."

"Consent, Roblado!—it is the very thing I desire above all things. My mind will not be easy while she is here. We are both in danger if such a report should get in circulation. If it should reach certain ears, we are ruined—are we not?"

"Why now there is some truth in what you say. Garcia's death must be reported, and the

cause will be inquired into. We must have our story as plausible as it can be made. There must be no color of a suspicion—no rumor! It will be well to get her off our hands for the present."

"But how—that it is that troubles me—how, without increasing the chances of suspicion? If we send her home, how is it to be explained? That would not be the act of Indians? You said you had some plan?"

"I think I have. But first tell me, colonel, what did you mean by saying she was mad?"

"That she was so; is so still,—so says Jose,—within the hour, muttering strange incongruities—knows not what is said to her. I tell you, Roblado, it terrified me."

"You are sure she knows not what is said to her?"

"Sure of it."

"So much the better. She will then not remember where she is or has been. Now I know that I have a plan—nothing easier than to get her off. She shall go back and tell—if she can tell anything—that she has been in the hands of the Indians! That will satisfy you?"

"But how can it be arranged?"

"My dear comandante, no difficulty in it. Listen! To-night, or before day in the morning, Gomez and Jose, in Indian costume as before, can carry her off to some spot which I shall indicate. In the mountains be it. No matter how far off or how near. She may be tied, and found in their company in the morning in such a way as to appear *their captive*. So much the better if she has recovered her senses enough to think so. Well; I with the troopers, in hunt after the cibolero, will come upon these Indians by accident. A few shots may be fired at sufficient distance to do them no hurt. They will make off, leaving their captive, whom we will rescue and bring back to the town, where she can be delivered out of our hands! Ha! ha! ha! What think you, Comandante, of my scheme?"

"Excellent!" replied Vizcarra, his mind seemingly relieved at the prospect of its execution.

"Why, it would blind the very devil! We shall not only be free from suspicion, but we'll get credit by it. What! a successful affair with the savages—rescue of a female captive!—restore her to her friends!—she, too, the sister of the very man who has endeavored to assassinate you! I tell you, comandante, the cibolero himself, if that will be any comfort to you, will be humbugged by it! She will swear—if *her word be worth anything*—that she has been in the hands of *los barbaros* all the while! She will give the lie even to her own brother!"

"The plan is excellent. It must be done to-night!"

"To-night, of course. As soon as the men have gone to bed, Gomez can start with her. I must give over the idea of following the trail to-day, and in truth, I regard that as idle. Our only chance for taking him will be to set our trap, with her for its bait; and that we can arrange hereafter. Give yourself no further uneasiness about it. By late breakfast to-morrow I shall make my report to you. 'Desperate affair with Jicarillas, or Yutas—several warriors killed—female captive rescued—valiant conduct of troops—recommend Corporal — for promotion, etc.' Ha! ha! ha!"

The comandante joined in this laugh, which, perhaps, he would not have done, but that Roblado had already assured him that his wound was not of the slightest danger, and would heal in a couple of weeks.

Roblado had given him assurance of this by calling the doctor a fool, and heaping upon him other opprobrious epithets. The delivery, therefore, from the fear of apprehended death, as well as from the other thought that was torturing him, had restored Vizcarra to a composure he had not enjoyed for the twenty-four hours preceding, and now he began to imbibe, to its full extent, another passion—that of vengeance against the cibolero.

That night, after tattoo had sounded, and the soldiers had retired to their respective quarters, a small mounted party was seen to issue from the gateway of the Presidio, and take a road that led in the direction of the mountains. The party consisted of three individuals. One, closely wrapped, and mounted upon a mule, appeared to be a female. The other two, oddly attired, and fantastically adorned with paint and feathers, might have been taken for a brace of Indian warriors. But they were not Indians. They were Spanish soldiers in Indian disguise. They were Sergeant Gomez and the soldier Jose in charge of the cibolero's sister.

CHAPTER XXII.

WHEN Carlos reached the edge of the chaparral, his pursuers were still only parting from the walls of the Presidio. Of course none followed him on foot, and it had taken the men some time to get their arms and horses ready. So far as he was concerned, he no longer feared pursuit, and would have scorned to take a circuitous path. He had such confidence in the steed he bestrode, that he knew he could escape before the eyes of his pursuers, and need not have hidden himself in the chaparral.

As he rode into the ambuscade he was thinking no longer of his own safety, but of that of Don Juan and his party. Their critical situation suddenly came before his mind. How were they to escape?

Even before he had half crossed the open ground this thought had troubled him more than his own peril, and a plan had been before him—to make direct for the pass of La Nina, and shun the chaparral altogether. This would have drawn the dragoons in the same direct course; and Don Juan, with his Tagnos, might have got off at their leisure.

Carlos would have put this plan in execution, could he have trusted to the prudence of Don Juan; but he feared to do so. The latter was somewhat rash, and not over-sagacious. Seeing Carlos in the act of escape, he might think it was his duty, as agreed upon, to show himself and his men on the edge of the thicket—the very thing Carlos now wished to prevent. For that reason the cibolero galloped direct to the place of ambuscade, where Don Juan and his men were waiting in their saddles.

"Thank God you are safe!" cried Don Juan; "but they are after you. Yonder they come in scores!"

"Yes!" replied Carlos, looking back; "and a good start I've gained on them!"

"What's best to be done?" inquired Don Juan. "Shall we scatter through the chaparral, or keep together? They'll be upon us soon!"

Carlos hesitated a moment before making reply. Three plans of action were possible, offering more or less chance of safety. First, to scatter through the chaparral as Don Juan had suggested; second, to make off together, and at once, *without showing themselves*, taking the back track, as they had come; and, third, to *show themselves* in front to the pursuers, and then retire on the back path. Of course the idea of fight was not entertained for a moment. That would have been idle, even absurd, under the circumstances.

The mind of the cibolero, used to quick action, examined these plans with the rapidity of thought itself. The first was rejected without a moment's consideration. To have scattered through the chaparral would have resulted in certain capture. The jungle was too small, not over a couple of miles in width, though extending to twice that length. There were soldiers enough to surround it, which they would do. They would beat it from side to side. They could not fail to capture half the party; and though these had made no demonstration as yet, they would be connected with the affair at the Presidio, and would be severely punished, if not shot down on the spot.

To attempt to get off through the chaparral without showing themselves at all would have been the plan that Carlos would have adopted had he not feared that they would be overtaken before night. The Tagnos were mounted on mules, already jaded, while most of the troopers rode good and swift horses. But for that Carlos might have hoped that they would escape unseen, and thus neither Don Juan nor his party would have been suspected of having had any part in the affair. This would be an important consideration for the future; but the plan was not to be thought of. The third plan was adopted.

The hesitation of the cibolero was not half so long as the time you have occupied in reading of it. Scarce ten seconds elapsed ere he made reply, not to Don Juan alone, but to the whole band, in a voice loud enough for all to hear. The reply was in the form of a command.

"Ride through the bush, all of you! Show yourselves near the front, your head and shoulders only, with your bows! Give your war cry, and then back till you are out of sight. Scatter right and left. Follow me."

As Carlos delivered these hurried directions, he dashed forward through the underwood and soon appeared near its edge. The Tagnos, guarded by Don Juan on one side and Antonio on the other, showed almost simultaneously in an irregular line along the margin of the thicket; and flourishing their bows above their heads, they uttered a defiant war-whoop, as though they were a party of savage Indians.

It would have required a practiced eye to have told from a short distance that they were not. Most of them were bare-headed, with long flowing hair; and, in fact, differing very little in appearance from their brethren of the plains. They all had bows, a weapon still carried by the Indios mansos when engaged in any hostilities; and their war cry differed not at all from some tribes called "bravos," "wild." Many in the band had but a short time left aside the full practice of warfare. Many of them were but neophytes to the arts of peace.

The effect of the demonstration was just what the cibolero had calculated on. The soldiers, who were galloping forward in straggling knots, and some of whom had got within three hundred paces of the chaparral, reined up in surprise. Several showed symptoms of a desire to gallop back again, but these were restrained at sight of a large body of their comrades now issuing from the Presidio.

The whole of them were taken by surprise.

They believed that the "Indios bravos" were in the chaparral, and no doubt in overwhelming numbers. Their belief was strengthened by the proceedings of the previous days, in which they had done naught else, as they supposed, but ride scout after "los barbaros." The latter had now come after them! They halted, therefore, on the plains, and waited for their fellows to come up.

That this would be the effect of his ruse Carlos foresaw. He now directed his companions to rein gently back until they were once more under cover of the brush; and the whole party arrived at the spot where they had waited in ambush.

Antonio then took the trail and guided them through the chaparral; not as they had come to La Nina, but by a path that led to the upper plain by another pass in the cliffs. From a point in this pass they obtained a distant view of the chaparral and the plain beyond. Though now full three miles from the place of ambush, they could see the valiant troopers still figuring on the open ground in front of it. They had not yet ventured to penetrate the dangerous underwood which they believed to be alive with ferocious savages!

Carlos, having reached the upper plain, struck off with his band in a direction nearly north. His object was to reach a ravine at some ten miles' distance across the plain, and this was gained without a single pursuer having appeared in the rear.

This ravine led in an easterly direction as far as the Pecos bottom. It was the channel of a stream, in which water flowed in the rainy season, but was now quite dry. Its bed was covered with small pebbles, and a horse-trail upon these was scarcely to be followed, as the track only displaced the pebbles, leaving no "sign" that could be "read" to any advantage. Old and new foot-marks were all the same.

Into this ravine the party descended, and after traveling down it for five or six miles halted, Carlos calling the halt for a special object—to detail a plan for their future proceeding, which had been occupying his attention during the last hour or two.

As yet, none of the party was compromised but himself. It would not advantage him that they should be, but the contrary. Neither Don Juan nor Antonio had shown themselves out of the thicket; and the other dusky faces, seen but for an instant through the brambles, could not have been recognized by the frightened troopers. If, therefore, Don Juan and his peons could get back to their home without observation, for them all would still be well.

This was a possible event. At starting Carlos had cautioned secrecy as to the expedition. It had left at an early hour, before any one was abroad, and no one knew of it. Indeed, no one in the valley was aware that the cibolero had returned before the news of the affair at the Presidio. His mules had been quietly unpacked and were herded at a distance from the rancho by one of his men. If, then, the troopers should not visit that neighborhood before the following day, Don Juan and his people could go back in the night and engage in their usual occupations without any suspicion. No doubt Roblado would be there in the morning, but not likely before. It was natural to suppose he would first endeavor to follow the route they had taken, and it led almost in the opposite direction from the house of Don Juan. To track them along all the windings of that route would be the work of one day at least. Then their pursuers would be no wiser as to where they had betaken themselves, for Carlos, from the point of halting, intended to adopt a plan that would be certain to throw the troopers off the trail.

It was decided, in fine, that Don Juan and his people should return home—that the peons of Carlos should also go back to the rancho; roof it on the following day—for it only wanted that; and remain by it as if nothing had occurred. They could not be made answerable for the deeds of their master.

As for the cibolero himself, his residence must remain unknown, except to one or two of his tried friends. He knew where he should find a shelter. To him the open plain or the mountain cave was a like a home. He needed no roof. The starry canopy was as welcome as the gilded ceiling of a palace.

The Tagnos were enjoined to secrecy. They were not sworn. A Tagno is not the man to talk; besides, they all knew that their own safety, perhaps their lives, depended on their silence.

All these matters were at length arranged, but the party remained where they had halted till near sunset. They then mounted, and continued on down the channel.

When they had gone a mile or so one of them climbed out of the ravine, and heading southward, rode off across the plain. This direction would bring him back to the valley, by a pass near the lower end of the settlement. It would be night by the time he could reach this pass, and he was not likely to encounter any one on the route—now that the "wild" Indians were abroad!

Shortly after, a second Tagno left the ravine and rode off in a line nearly parallel to that taken by the first. Soon another imitated the example, and then another and another, until all had forsaken the ravine except Don Juan, Antonio, and the cibolero himself. The Tagnos had been instructed to reach home by different passes, and some of them, more sagacious, were sent by the most circuitous paths. There was no trooper belonging to the Presidio likely to follow that trail.

Carlos and his two companions, after riding to the furthest end of the ravine, also turned to the right, and re-entered the valley of San Ildefonso at its lower extremity. It was quite dark, but all of them knew the road well, and about midnight they arrived near the house of the young ranchero.

A reconnaissance was necessary before they dared approach. That was soon made, and the report brought back that all was right, and no troopers had yet made their appearance.

Carlos once more embraced his mother hurriedly, related what had passed, gave some instructions to Don Juan, and then, mounting his horse, rode off from the place.

He was followed by Antonio and a pack-mule loaded with provisions. They passed down the valley, and struck out in the direction of the Llano Estacado.

CHAPTER XXIII.

On the following day a new incident created a fresh surprise among the inhabitants of San Ildefonso, already excited by an unusual series of "novedades."

About noon a party of lancers passed through the town on their way to the Presidio. They were returning from a scout in search of the "assassin"—so Carlos was designated. Of him they had found no traces; but they had fallen in with a large body of "Indios bravos" among the spurs of the mountains, with whom they had had a terrific conflict! This had resulted in the loss of great numbers killed on the part of the Indians, who had contrived, as usual, to carry off their dead—hence, the soldiers had returned without scalps! They had brought however, a far more positive trophy of victory—a young girl belonging to the settlement, whom they had recaptured from the savages, and whom Captain Roblado—the gallant leader of the expedition—supposed to be the same that had been carried off a few days before from a rancho at the lower end of the valley!

The captain halted in the plaza, with a few men—those in charge of the recovered captive. The remainder of the troop passed on to the Presidio.

Roblado's object in stopping in the town, or in coming that way—for it did not lie in his return route—was threefold. First, to deliver his charge into the hands of the civic authorities; secondly, to make sure that everybody should witness the delivery, and be satisfied by this living evidence that a great feat had been performed; and thirdly, that he might have the opportunity of a little swagger in front of a certain balcony.

These three objects the captain attained, but the last of them did not turn out quite to his satisfaction. Although the bugle had played continuously, announcing the approach of a troop—although the recovered captive was placed conspicuously in the ranks—and although his (Roblado's) horse, under the influence of sharp spurs, pitched himself into the most superb attitudes, all went for nothing—Catalina did not show in the balcony! Among the faces of "dependientes" and "criados," hers was not to be seen; and the triumphant look of the victorious leader, as soon as he had ridden past, changed to a gloomy expression of disappointment.

A few minutes after he dismounted in front of the "Casa de Cabildo," where he delivered the girl into the hands of the alcalde and other authorities of the town. This ceremony was accompanied by a grandiloquent speech, in which an account of the recapture was given with some startling details; sympathy was expressed for the parents of the girl, *whoever they might be*; and the speaker wound up by expressing his opinion that the unfortunate captive could be no other than the young girl reported to have been carried off a few days before!

All this was very plausible and proper; and Roblado, having resigned his charge to the keeping of the alcalde, mounted and rode off amidst a storm of complimentary phrases from the authorities, and "vivas" of applause from the populace.

"Dios lo pague, capitan!" (God reward you, captain!) was the prayer that reached his ears as he pushed through the crowd!

A keen physiognomist could at that moment have detected in the corner of Roblado's eye a very odd expression—a mingling of irony with a strong desire to laugh. In fact, the gallant captain could hardly keep from bursting out in the faces of his admirers, and was only restrained from doing so by the desire of keeping the joke bottled up till he could enjoy it in the company of the comandante—to whom he was now hastening.

Back to the captive.

The crowd pressed around her, all eager to gratify their curiosity. Strange to say that this feeling predominated. There was less appearance of sympathy than might have been looked for under the circumstances. The number of those that uttered the "pobrecita!"—that tender expression of Mexican pity—was few; and they were principally the poor dark-skinned native women. The well-dressed shopkeepers, both Gachupinos and Criollos, both men and women, looked on with indifference, or with no other feeling than that of morbid curiosity.

Such an indifference to suffering is by no means a characteristic of the New Mexican people—I should rather say of the females of that land—for the men are brutal enough. As regards the former, the very opposite character is theirs.

Their conduct would be unaccountable, therefore, but for the knowledge of a fact which guided it on this occasion. They knew who the captive girl was—they knew she was the sister of Carlos the cibolero—Carlos the murderer! This it was that checked the flow of their better feelings.

Against Carlos the popular indignation was strong. "Asesino," "ladron," "ingrato," were the terms used in speaking of him. A wretch! to have murdered the good lieutenant—the favorite of the place; and for what motive? Some paltry quarrel or jealousy! What motive, indeed? There seems no motive but a thirst of blood on the part of this "demonio," this "guero heretico." Ungrateful wretch, too, to have attempted the life of the valiant comandante—he who had been striving all he could to recover the assassin's sister from the Indian savages!

And now he had actually succeeded! Only think of it! There she was, brought safe home again by the agency of this very comandante, who had sent his captain and soldiers for her—this very man whom he would have killed! *Demonio! asesino! ladron!* They would all be glad to see him seated in the chair of the "garrote." No "buen Catolico" would have acted as he had done—no one but a sinful "heretico"—a blood-loving "Americano!" How he would be punished *when caught!*

Such were the feelings of all the populace, except, perhaps, the poor slaves—the *mansos*—and a very few Criollos, who, although not approving of the acts of Carlos, held revolutionary principles, and hated the Spanish regime with all their hearts.

With such prejudice against the cibolero, no wonder that there was but little sympathy for the forlorn creature, his sister.

That it was his sister no one doubted, although there were few on the spot who knew either. Up to the day of the fiesta her brother, now so notorious, was but little known to the inhabitants of the town, which he rarely visited—she less; and there were but few in the place who had ever seen her before that hour. But the identity was unmistakable. The fair, golden hair, the white skin, the glowing red of the cheeks, though common in other parts of the world, were rare characteristics in North Mexico. The proclamation upon the walls described the "asesino" as possessing them. This could be no other than his sister. Besides, there were those who had seen her at the fiesta, where her beauty had not failed to attract both admiration and envy.

She looked beautiful as ever, though the red was not so bright on her cheek, and a singular, wild expression appeared in her eyes. To the questions put to her she either answered not or returned vague replies. She sat in silence; but several times broke forth into strange, unintelligible, exclamatory phrases, in which the words "Indios" and "barbaros" repeatedly occurred.

"*Esta loca!*" ("She is mad!") muttered one to another; "she fancies she is still with the savages!"

Perhaps it was so. Certainly she was not among friends.

The alcalde inquired if there was any one present—relative or friend—to whom he could deliver her up.

A young girl, a poblana, who had just arrived on the spot, came forward. She knew the "pobrecita." She would take charge of her, and conduct her to her home.

A half-Indian woman was in company with the poblana. It might have been her mother. Between the two the restored captive was led away; and the crowd soon dispersed and returned to their various avocations.

The girl and her conductors turned into a narrow street that led through the suburb where the poorest people lived. Passing this, they emerged into the open country; and then, following an unfrequented path through the chaparral, a few hundred yards brought them to a small mud rancho, which they entered. In a few minutes after a carreta, in which sat a peon, was driven up to the door, and stopped there.

The poblana, leading the girl by the hand, came out of the house, and both mounted into the carreta.

As soon as the two were seated upon the bunches of dry 'zacate' thrown into the carreta for this purpose, the driver goaded his oxen and moved off. The vehicle, after passing out of the chaparral path, took the main road leading to the lower settlements of the valley.

As they moved on the poblana regarded her companion with kind looks, and assisted her in arranging her seat, so as to defend her as much as possible against the joltings of the carreta. She added numerous expressions of a sympathizing and consolatory character, but none that bespoke recognition or old acquaintance. It was evident that the girl had never seen Rosita before.

When they had gone about a mile from the town, and were moving along an unfrequented part of the road, a horseman was seen coming after, and at such a speed as to overtake them in a few minutes. He was mounted on a pretty mustang that bore the signs of being well cared for. Its flanks were rounded with fat, and it capered as it galloped along.

As it came close to the carreta the rider called out to the driver to stop; and it then appeared that the horseman was a woman, as the soft, sweet voice at once indicated. More than that, the rider was a *senorita*, as the soft cheek, the silky hair, and the delicate features showed. At a distance it was natural enough to have taken her for one of the opposite sex. A common serape covered her shoulders; a broad-brimmed sombrero concealed most of her black, shining hair; and she rode according to the general custom of the country—the custom of its men.

"Why, *senorita*!—is it you?" asked the poblana, in a tone of surprise, and with a gesture of respect.

"Ha! ha! you did not know me then, *Josefa*?"

"No, *senorita*—*ay de mi!* how could I in that disguise?"

"Disguise do you call it? Why, it is the usual costume!"

"True, *senorita*, but not for a grand *senora* like you. *Carrambo!*"

"Well, I think I must be disguised, as I passed several acquaintances who would not bow to me! Ha! ha!"

"*Pobrecita—ita—ita!*" continued she, suddenly changing her tone, and regarding *Josefa*'s companion with a look of kind sympathy. "How she must have suffered! Poor dear girl! I fear it is true what they have told me. *Santissima Virgen!* how like—"

The phrase was unfinished. The speaker had forgotten the presence of *Josefa* and the peon, and was delivering her thoughts in too loud a soliloquy. The unfinished sentence had involuntarily escaped from her lips.

Suddenly checking herself, she looked sharply toward the two. The peon was busy with his oxen, but the poblana's face wore an expression of curiosity.

"Like whom, *senorita*?" innocently inquired she.

"One whom I know. No matter, *Josefa*." And, as the lady said this, she raised her finger to her lips, and looked significantly toward the peon.

Josefa, who knew her secret, and who guessed the "one" meant, remained silent. After a moment the lady drew her mustang nearer the carreta, upon the side of which *Josefa* sat, and, bending over, whispered to the latter:

"Remain below till the morning; you will be too late to return to-night. Remain! perhaps you may hear something. Come early—not to the house. Be in time for *oracion*. You will find me in the church. Perhaps you may see Antonio. If so, give him this." A diamond set in a golden circlet sparkled a moment at the tips of the lady's fingers, and then lay hid in the shut fist of the poblana. "Tell him for whom—he need not know who sent it. There is money for your expenses, and some to give her, or give it to her mother, if they will accept it." Here a purse fell in *Josefa*'s lap. "Bring me news! oh, bring me news, dear *Josefa*! *Adios! adios!*"

The last salutation was uttered hurriedly; and, as the lady pronounced it, she wheeled her glossy mustang and galloped back toward the town.

She need not have doubted that *Josefa* would fulfill her instructions about "remaining below until the morning!" for the poblana was nearly, if not quite, as much interested as herself in this journey. The rather pretty *Josefa* chanced to be the sweetheart of the half-blooded Antonio; and whether she saw Antonio or not, she was not likely to hurry back that night. If she did not see him, so much the pleasanter to remain; if not, she should remain in the hope of such an event.

With a full purse of "pesos"—a sixth of which would pay expenses—and the prospect of meeting with Antonio, the rough carreta seemed all at once transformed to an elegant coach, with springs and velvet cushions,—such as *Josefa* had heard of, but had never seen!

The kind-hearted girl readjusted the seats, placed the head of Rosita on her lap, spread her rebozo over her to keep off the evening dew,

and then told the peon to move on. The latter uttered a loud "ho-ha!" touched his oxen with the goad, and once more set them in motion along the dusty road.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE bell of the church of San Ildefonso had just commenced to ring for "oracion," when a female form was seen issuing from the gateway of one of the largest mansions of the town, and taking the direction of the church. It was yet scarce daybreak, and the person thus observed was closely muffled; but her tall upright form, the dignity and grace of her carriage, and the proud elastic step told that she was a grand *senora*. As she reached the portal of the church she stopped for some moments and looked around. Her face was not visible, as it was "tapada" under the folds of a closely-drawn manta; but her attitude, with her head occasionally moving around, showed that she was scanning the figures that, at the summons of the bell, approached like shadows through the gray light. She was evidently expecting some one; and from the eager scrutiny with which she regarded each new form that entered the plaza, it was some one whose presence was much desired.

The last of the devotees had arrived and entered the church. It would be idle to remain longer; and, turning on her heel with an air of disappointment, the lady glided across the portal, and disappeared through the door.

In another moment she was kneeling in front of the altar, repeating her orisons and telling over the beads of her rosary.

She was not the last to enter the church; still, another devotee came later. About the time that she was leaving the portal a carreta drove into the plaza, and halted in a remote corner. A young girl leaped out of the carreta, tripped nimbly across the square, in the direction of the church, and passed within the portal. The dress of this new-comer—a flaming red "nagua," brodered chemisette, and rebozo—showed that she belonged to the poorer class of citizens. She was a poblana.

She entered the church, but before kneeling, she threw an inquiring glance along the array of backs. Her eye became fixed upon one that was covered with a manta. It was that of the lady of whom we have spoken. This seemed to satisfy the poblana, who, gliding over the floor, knelt down in such a position that her elbow almost rested against that of the lady.

So silently had this movement been executed that the lady did not perceive her new neighbor until a slight "nudge" upon the elbow caused her to start and look round. A gleam of satisfaction lit up her features, though her lips continued to repeat the prayer, as if nothing had happened.

After a while came the cue for adopting the pose of rest, and then the two kneeling figures—*senorita* and poblana—dropped toward each other, so that their arms touched. A moment later and two hands became uncovered—one a little brown-skinned paw from under the rebozo—the other, a delicate arrangement of white and jeweled fingers, from the manta.

They came in contact as if by a mutual understanding, and, though they were *en rapport* but a half-second, a close observer might have noticed a small roll of paper passed from one to the other—from the brown fingers to the white ones! It would have required a close observer to have noticed this maneuver, for so adroitly was it executed that none of those kneeling around, either in front or rear, saw anything amiss.

The two hands again disappeared under their respective covers; the little bell tinkled, and both *senora* and poblana once more shot into an upright position, and, with most devout looks, repeated the prayers of the *misa*.

When the "oracion" was over, and while sprinkling themselves at the sacred fount, a few hurried words passed between them; but they went out of the church separately, and walked off in separate directions. The poblana hastened across the square, and disappeared into a narrow street. The *senora* walked proudly back to the mansion whence she had come, her countenance radiant with joyful anticipation.

As soon as she had entered the house she proceeded directly to her own chamber, and, opening the little folded slip of paper, read:

"QUERIDA CATALINA:

"You have made me happy. But an hour ago I was the most wretched of men. I had lost my sister, and I feared your esteem. Both are restored to me. My sister is by my side, and the gem that sparkles on my finger tells me that even calumny has failed to rob me of your friendship—your love. You do not deem me an assassin. No; nor am I one. I have been an avenger, but no assassin. You shall know all—the fearful plot of which I and mine have been the victims. It is scarce credible—so great is its atrocity! I am indeed its victim. I can no more show myself in the settlement. I am henceforth to be hunted like the wolf, and treated as one if captured. I care not for that, so long as I know that you are not among my enemies.

"But for you I should go far hence. I cannot leave you. I would sooner risk life every hour in the day than exile myself from the spot where you dwell—you, the only being I can ever love.

"I have kissed the gem a hundred times. In life, the sweet token can never part from me.

"My foes are after me like bloodhounds, but I fear them not. My brave steed is never out of my sight, and with him I can scorn my cowardly pursuers. But I must venture one visit to the town. I must see you once, *querida*. I have words for you I cannot trust to paper. Do not refuse to see me, and I shall come to the old place of meeting. To-morrow night—midnight. Do not refuse me, dearest love. I have much to explain that I cannot without seeing you face to face. You shall know that I am not an assassin—that I am still worthy of being your lover.

"Thanks!—thanks for your kindness to my poor little wounded bird! I trust to God she will soon be well again. *My querida, adios!*"

When the beautiful lady had finished reading the note, she pressed it to her lips and fervently kissed it.

"Worthy of being my lover!" she murmured; "ay, worthy to be the lover of a queen! Brave, noble Carlos!"

Again she kissed the paper, and, thrusting it into her bosom, glided softly from the apartment.

CHAPTER XXV.

VIZCARRA'S desire for revenge grew stronger every hour. The almost joyful reaction he had experienced, when relieved from the fear of death, was short-lived. So, too, was that which followed his relief from the anxiety about his captive. The thought that now tortured him was of a different character. The very breath of his existence—his personal appearance—was ruined forever. He was disfigured for life.

When the mirror was passed before his face it caused his heart to burn like a coal of fire. Coward though he was, he would almost as soon have been killed outright.

Several of his teeth were gone. They might have been replaced; but not so could be restored the mutilated cheek. A portion had been carried off by the "tear" of the bullet. There would be a hideous scar never to be healed!

The sight was horrible. His thoughts were horrible. He groaned outright as he contemplated the countenance which the *cibolero* had given him. He swore vengeance. Death and torture if he could but capture Carlos—death to him and his!

At times he even repented that he had sent away the sister. Why should he have cared for consequences? Why had he not revenged himself upon her? He no longer loved her. Her scornful laugh still rankled in his heart. She had been the cause of all his sufferings—of sufferings that would never end but with life—chagrin and mortification for the rest of his days! Why had he not taken her life? That would have been sweet revenge upon the brother. It would almost have been satisfaction.

He tossed upon his couch, tortured with these reflections, and giving utterance at intervals to groans of anguish and horrid imprecations.

Carlos must be captured. No effort must be spared to insure that event. And captured alive if possible. He should measure out the punishment. It should be death, but not sudden death. No; the savages of the plains should be his teachers. The *cibolero* should die like a captive Indian—by fire at the stake. Vizcarra swore this!

After him, the mother, too. She was deemed a witch. She should be punished as often witches have been. In this he would not have to act alone. He knew that the padres would indorse the act. They were well inclined to such fanatical cruelties.

Then the sister, alone—uncared for by any one. She would be wholly in his power—to do with her as he would, and no one to stay his will. It was not love, but revenge.

Such terrible resolves passed through the mind of the wretched caitiff.

Roblado was equally eager for the death of the *cibolero*. His vanity had been scathed as well, for he was now satisfied that Catalina was deeply interested in the man, if not already on terms of intimacy—on terms of love, mutually reciprocated and understood. He had visited her since the tragical occurrence at the Presidio. He had observed a marked change in her manner. He had thought to triumph by the malignant abuse heaped on the assassin; but she, although she said nothing in defense of the latter—of course she could not—was equally silent on the other side, and showed no symptoms of indignation at the deed. His (Roblado's) abusive epithets, joined to those which her own father liberally heaped upon the man, seemed to give her pain. It was plain she would have defended him had she dared!

All this Roblado had noticed during his morning call.

But more still had he learned, for he had a spy upon her acts. One of her maids, *Vicenza*, who for some reason had taken dislike to her mistress, was false to her, and had, for a length of time, been the confidant of the military wooer. A little gold and flattery, and a soldier-sweetheart—who chanced to be Jose—had rendered *Vicenza* accessible. Roblado was master of her thoughts, and through Jose he received information regarding Catalina, of which the latter never dreamt. This system of espionage

had been but lately established, but it had already produced fruits. Through it Roblado had gained the knowledge that he himself was hated by the object of his regard, and that she loved some other! What other even Vicenza could not tell. That other Roblado could easily guess.

It is not strange that he desired the capture and death of Carlos the cibolero. He was as eager for that event as Vizcarra himself.

Both were making every exertion to bring it about. Already scouting parties had been sent out in different directions. A proclamation had been posted on the walls of the town, the joint production of the comandante and his captain, offering a high reward for the cibolero's head, and a still higher sum for the cibolero himself if captured alive!

The citizens, to show their zeal and loyalty, had also issued a proclamation to the same effect, heading it with a large sum subscribed among them—a very fortune to the man who should be so lucky as to be the captor of Carlos. This proclamation was signed by all the principal men of the place, and the name of Don Ambrosio figured high upon the list! There was even some talk of getting up a volunteer company to assist the soldiers in the pursuit of the heretico assassin, or rather to earn the golden price of his capture.

With such a forfeit on his head, it was an enigma how Carlos should be long alive!

Roblado sat in his quarters busy devising plans for the capture. He had already sent his trustiest spies to the lower end of the valley, and these were to hover day and night in the neighborhood. Any information of the haunts of the cibolero, or of those with whom he was formerly in correspondence, was to be immediately brought to him, and would be well paid for. A watch was placed on the house of the young ranchero, Don Juan; and though both Vizcarra and Roblado had determined on special action with regard to him, they agreed upon leaving him undisturbed for the present, as that might facilitate their plans. The spies who had been employed were not soldiers, but men of the town and poor rancheros. A military force appearing below would frustrate their design. That, however, was kept in readiness, but its continued presence near the rancho, thought Vizcarra and his captain, would only frighten the bird and prevent it from returning to its nest. There was good logic in this.

Roblado, as stated, was in his quarters, completing his arrangements. A knock aroused him from the contemplation of some documents. They were communications from his spies, which had just reached the Presidio, addressed both to himself and the comandante. They were concerning the affair.

"Who is it?" he asked, before giving the privilege to enter.

"I, captain," answered a sharp, squeaky voice.

Roblado evidently knew the voice, for he called out:

"Oh, it is you? Come in, then."

The door opened, and a small dark man, of sharp, weasel-like aspect, entered the room. He had a skulking, shuffling gait, and notwithstanding his soldier's dress, his saber and his spurs, the man looked mean. He spoke with a cringing accent, and saluted his officer with a cringing gesture. He was just the sort of person to be employed upon some equivocal service, and by such men as Vizcarra and Roblado; and in that way he had more than once served them. It was the soldier Jose.

"Well, what have you to say? Have you seen Vicenza?"

"I have, captain. Last night I met her out."

"Any news?"

"I don't know whether it may be news to the captain; but she has told me that it was the senorita that sent her home yesterday."

"Her?"

"Yes, captain, the guera."

"Ha! go on!"

"Why, you know when you left her with the alcalde she was offered to whoever would take her. Well, a young girl came up and claimed to be an acquaintance, and a woman who was the girl's mother. She was given up to them without more ado, and they took her away to a house in the chaparral below the town."

"She did not stay there. I know she's gone down; but I have not yet heard the particulars. How did she go?"

"Well, captain; only very shortly after she arrived at the house of the woman, a carreta came up to the door, driven by a Tagno, and the girl—that is, the daughter, who is called Josefa—mounted into the carreta, taking the guera along with her, and off they went down below."

"Now, neither this girl nor her mother ever saw the guera before, and who does captain think sent them, and the carreta, too?"

"Who says Vicenza?"

"The senorita, captain."

"Ha!" sharply exclaimed Roblado. "Vicenza is sure of that?"

"More than that, captain. About the time the carreta drove away, or a little after, the senorita left her house on her horse, and with a

common serape over her, and a sombrero on her head, like any ranchera, and in this—which I take to be a disguise for a lady of quality like her—she rode off by the back road. Vicenza, however, thinks she turned into the *camino abajo* after she got past the houses, and overtook the carreta. She was gone long enough to have done so."

This communication seemed to make a deep impression upon the listener. Shadows flitted over his dark brow, and gleams of some new intelligence or design appeared in his eyes. He was silent for a moment, engaged in communicating with his thoughts. At length he inquired:

"Is that all your information, Jose?"

"All, captain."

"There may be more from the same source. See Vicenza to night again. Tell her to keep a close watch. If she succeed in discovering that there is a correspondence going on, she shall be well rewarded, and you shall not be forgotten. Find out more about this woman and her daughter. Know the Tagno who drove them. Lose no time about it. Go, Jose!"

The minion returned his thanks in a cringing tone, made another cringing salute, and shuffled out of the room.

As soon as he had left, Roblado sprang to his feet, and walking about the room in an agitated manner, uttered his thoughts aloud:

"By Heaven! I had not thought of this. A correspondence, I have no doubt. Fiends! such a woman! She must know all ere this—if the fellow himself is not deceived by us! I must watch in that quarter too. Who knows but that will be the trap in which we'll take him! Love is even a stronger lure than brotherly affection. Ha! senorita; if this be true, I'll yet have a purchase upon you that you little expect. I'll bring you to terms without the aid of your stupid father!"

After figuring about for some minutes, indulging in these alternate dreams of vengeance and triumph, he left his room, and proceeded toward that of the comandante, for the purpose of communicating to the latter his new-gotten knowledge.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE house of Don Ambrosio de Cruces was not a town mansion. It was suburban—that is, it stood upon the outskirts of the village, some seven or eight hundred yards from the plaza. It was detached from the other buildings, and at some distance from any of them. It was neither a "villa" nor a "cottage." There are no such buildings in Mexico, nor anything at all resembling them. In fact, the architecture of that country is of unique and uniform style, from north to south, through some thousand miles of latitude! The smaller kinds of houses—the ranchos of the poorer classes—show a variety corresponding to the three thermal divisions arising from different elevation—*caliente, templada* and *fria*. In the hot lands of the coast, and some low valleys in the interior, the rancho is a frail structure of cane and poles, with a thatch of palm-leaves. On the elevated "valles," or table-plains—and here, be it observed, dwell most of the population—it is built of "adobes," and this rule is universal. On the forest-covered sides of the more elevated mountains the rancho is a house of logs, a "log-cabin," with long hanging eaves and shingled roof, differing entirely from the log-cabin of the American backwoods, and far excelling the latter in neatness and picturesque appearance.

So much for the "ranchos." About them there is some variety of style. Not so with "casas grandes," or houses of the rich. A sameness characterizes them through thirty degrees of latitude—from one extremity of Mexico to the other; and, we might almost add, throughout all Spanish America. If now and then a "whimsical" structure be observed, you may find, on inquiry, that the owner is some foreigner resident—an English miner, a Scotch manufacturer, or a German merchant.

These remarks are meant only for the houses of the country. In small villages the same style as the country-house is observed, with very slight modifications; but in large towns, although some of the characteristics are still retained, there is an approximation to the architecture of European cities—more particularly, of course, to those of Spain.

The house of Don Ambrosio differed very little from the general fashion of "casas grandes" of country style. It had the same aspect of gaol, fortress, convent, or workhouse—whichever you please; but this aspect was considerably lightened by the peculiar coloring of the walls, which was done in broad, vertical bands of red, white, and yellow, alternating with each other! The effect produced by this arrangement of gay colors is quite Oriental, and is a decided relief to the otherwise heavy appearance of a Mexican dwelling. In some parts of the country this fashion is common.

In shape there was no peculiarity. Standing upon the road in front you see a long wall, with a large gateway near the middle, and three or four windows irregularly set. The windows are shielded with bars of wrought-

iron standing vertically. That is the "reja." None of them have either sash or glass. The gateway is closed by a heavy wooden door, strongly clasped and bolted with iron. This front wall is but one story high, but its top is continued so as to form a parapet, breast-high above the roof, and this gives it a loftier appearance. The roof being flat behind, the parapet is not visible from below. Look around the corner at either end of this front wall. You will see no gable—there is no such thing on a house of the kind we are describing. In its place you will see a dead wall of the same height as the parapet, running back for a long distance; and were you to go to the end of it, and again look around the corner, you would find a similar wall at the back closing in the parallelogram.

In reality you have not yet seen the true front of Don Ambrosio's house, if we mean by that the part most embellished. A Mexican spends but little thought on the outside appearance of his mansion. It is only from the courtyard, or "patio," you can get a view of the front upon which the taste of the owner is displayed, and this often exhibits both grandeur and elegance.

Let us pass through the gateway, and enter the "patio." The "portero," when summoned by knock or bell, admits us by a small door, forming part of the great gate already mentioned. We traverse an arched way, the "saguan," running through the breadth of the building, and then we are in the patio. From this we have a view of the real front of the house.

The patio itself is paved with painted bricks—a tessellated pavement. A fountain, with jet and ornamental basin, occupies its center; and several trees, well trimmed, stand in large vessels, so that their roots may not injure the pavement. Around this court you see the doors of the different apartments, some of them glazed and tastefully curtained. The doors of the "sala," the "cuarto," and the sleeping-rooms, are on three sides, while the "cocina" (kitchen), the "dispensa" (store-room), "granero" (granary), with the "caballeriza" and coach-house, make up the remaining part of the square.

There is still an important portion of the mansion to be spoken of—the "azotea," or roof. It is reached by an "escalera," or stone staircase. It is flat and quite firm, being covered with a cement that is proof against rain. It is inclosed by a parapet running all round it—of such a height as not to hinder the view of the surrounding country, while it protects those occupying it from the intrusive gaze of persons passing below. When the sun is down, or behind a cloud, the azotea is a most agreeable promenade; and to render it still more so, that over the house of Don Ambrosio had been arranged so as to resemble a flower-garden. Richly japanned pots, containing rare flowers, were placed around, and green boughs and gay blossoms, rising above the top of the wall, produced a fine effect on the building from without.

But this was not the only garden belonging to the mansion of the rich miner. Another, of oblong shape, extended from the rear of the house, inclosed by a high wall of adobes on either side. These, ending upon the bank of the stream, formed the boundary of the garden. Along the stream there was no fence, as it was here of sufficient breadth and depth to form an inclosure of itself. The garden was of large extent, including an orchard of fruit-trees at its lower part, and it was tastefully laid out in walks, flower-beds and arbors of different shapes and sizes. Don Ambrosio, although but a rich *parvenu*, might have been supposed to be a man of refined taste by any one viewing this garden—the more so, as such delightful retreats are by no means common in that country. But it was to another mind than his that these shadowy trees and fragrant arbors owed their existence. They were the "ideas" of his fair daughter, many of whose hours were spent beneath their shade.

To Don Ambrosio the sight of a great cavity in the earth, with huge quarries of quartz rock or scoria, and a rich "veta" at the back, was more agreeable than all the flowers in the world. A pile of "barras de plata" would be to his eyes more interesting than a whole country covered with black tulips and blue dahlias.

Not to his fair daughter, Catalina. Her taste was both elevated and refined. The thought of wealth, the pride of riches, never entered her mind. She would willingly have surrendered all her much-talked-of inheritance to have shared the humble rancho of him she loved.

CHAPTER XXVII.

It was near sunset. The yellow orb was hastening to kiss the snowy summit of the Sierra Blanca, that barred the western horizon. The white mantle that draped the shoulders of the mountain, reflected beautiful roseate tints, deepening into red and purple in the hollows of the ravines, and seeming all the more lovely from the contrast of the dark forests that covered the Sierra further down.

It was a sunset more brilliant than common. The western sky was filled with masses of

colored clouds, in which gold and purple and cerulean blue mingled together in gorgeous magnificence; and in which the eye of the beholder could not fail to note the outlines of strange forms, and fancy them bright and glorious beings of another world. It was a picture to gladden the eye, to give joy to the heart that was sad, and make happier the happy.

It was not unobserved. Eyes were dwelling upon it—beautiful eyes; and yet there was a sadness in their look that ill accorded with the picture on which they were gazing.

But those eyes were not drawing their inspiration from the sky-painting before them. Though apparently regarding it, the thoughts which gave them expression were drawn from a far different source. The heart within was dwelling upon another object.

The owner of those eyes was a beautiful girl, or rather a fully-developed woman still unmarried. She was standing upon the azotea of a noble mansion, apparently regarding the rich sunset, while in reality her thoughts were busy with another theme, and one that was less pleasant to contemplate. Even the brilliant glow of the sky, reflected upon her countenance, did not dissipate the shadows that were passing over it. The clouds from within overcame the light from without. There were shadows flitting over her heart that corresponded to those that darkened her fair face.

It was a beautiful face withal, and a beautiful form—tall, majestic, of soft graces and waving outlines. The lady was Catalina de Cruces.

She was alone upon the azotea—surrounded only by the plants and flowers. Bending over the low parapet that overlooked the garden to the rear, she at the same time faced toward the sinking orb—for the garden extended westward.

Now and then her eyes were lifted to the sky and the sun; but oftener they sought the shaded copse of wild china-trees at the bottom of the inclosure, through whose slender trunks gleamed the silvery surface of the stream. Upon this spot they rested from time to time, with an expression of strange interest. No wonder that to those eyes that was an interesting spot—it was that where love's first vows had been uttered in her delighted ear—it had been consecrated by a kiss, and in her thoughts it was hallowed from the "earth's profound" to the high heaven above her. No wonder she regarded it as the fairest on earth. The most famed gardens of the world—even Paradise itself—in her imagination, had no spot so sweet, no nook so shady, as the little arbor she had herself trained amid the foliage of those wild china-trees.

Why was she regarding it with a look of sadness? In that very arbor, and on that very night, did she expect to meet him—the one who had rendered it sacred. Why then was she sad? Such a prospect should have rendered her countenance radiant with joy.

And so it was, at intervals, when this thought came into her mind; but there was another—some other thought—that brought those clouds upon her brow, and imparted that air of uneasy apprehension. What was that thought?

In her hand she held a bandolon. She flung herself upon a bench, and began to play some old Spanish air. The effort was too much for her. Her thoughts wandered from the melody and her fingers from the strings.

She laid down the instrument, and again rising to her feet, paced backward and forward upon the azotea. Her walk was irregular. At intervals she stopped, and lowering her eyes, seemed to think intently on something that was absent. Then she would start forward and stop again in the same manner as before. This she repeated several times, without uttering either word or exclamation.

Once she continued her walk all around the azotea, casting a scrutinizing look among the plants and flower-pots on both sides, as if in search of something; but whatever it was, she was unsuccessful, as nothing appeared to arrest her attention.

She returned once more, and took up the bandolon. But her fingers had hardly touched the strings before she laid the instrument down again, and rose from the bench, as if some sudden resolution had taken possession of her.

"I never thought of that—I may have dropped it in the garden!" she muttered to herself, as she glided toward a small escalera that led down into the patio.

From this point an avenue communicated with the garden; and the next moment she had passed through this and was tripping over the sanded walks, bending from side to side, and peeping behind every plant and bush that could have concealed the object of her search.

She explored every part of the inclosure, and lingered a moment in the arbor among the china-trees—as if she enjoyed that spot more than any other—but she came back at length with the same anxious expression, that told she was not rewarded by the recovery of whatever she had lost.

The lady once more returned to the azotea—once more took up the bandolon; but after a few touches of the strings, laid it down, and again rose to her feet. Again she soliloquized:

"*Carrambo!* it is very strange!—neither in my chamber—the sala, the cuarto, the azotea, the garden!—where can it be? Oh Dios! if it should fall into the hands of papa! It is too intelligible—it could not fail to be understood—no—no—no! Oh Dios! if it should reach other hands!—those of his enemies! It names to-night—true, it does not tell the place, but the time is mentioned—the place would be easily discovered. Oh! that I knew where to communicate with him! But I know not, and he will come. *Ay de mí!* it cannot be prevented now. I must hope no enemy has got it. But where can it be? Madre de Dios! where can it be?"

All these phrases were uttered in a tone and emphasis that showed the concern of the speaker at the loss of some object that greatly interested her. That object was no other than the note brought by Josefa, and written by Carlos the cibolero, in which the assignation for that night had been appointed. No wonder she was uneasy at its loss! The wording not only compromised herself, but placed the life of her lover in extreme peril. This it was that was casting the dark shadows over her countenance—this it was that was causing her to traverse the azotea and the garden in such anxious search.

"I must ask Vicenza," she continued. "I like not to do it, for I have lost confidence in her of late. Something has changed this girl. She used to be frank and honest, but now she has grown false and hypocritical. Twice have I detected her in the act of deceiving me. What does it mean?"

She paused a moment as if in thought. I must ask her notwithstanding. She may have found the paper, and, not deeming it of any use may have thrown it in the fire! Fortunately she does not read, but she has to do with others who can. Ha! I forgot her soldier sweetheart! If she should have found it, and shown it to him! *Dios de mi alma!*"

This supposition seemed a painful one, for it caused the lady's heart to beat louder, and her breathing became short and quick.

"That would be terrible!" she continued—"that would be the very worst thing that could happen. I do not like that soldier—he appears mean and cunning, and I have heard is a bad fellow, though favored by the comandante. God forefend he should have gotten this paper! I shall lose no more time. I shall call Vicenza, and question her."

She stepped forward to the parapet that overlooked the patio.

"Vicenza!—Vicenza!"

"*Aquí, señorita,*" answered a voice from the interior of the house.

"*Ven acá!—Ven acá!*" (Come hither.)

"*Si, señorita.*"

"*Anda! Anda!*" (Quickly.)

A girl, in short, bright-colored nagua, and white chemisette without sleeves, came out into the patio, and climbed up the escalera that led to the roof.

She was a *mestiza*, or half-blood, of Indian and Spanish mixture, as her brownish-white skin testified. She was not ill-looking; but there was an expression upon her countenance that precluded the idea of either virtue, honesty, or amiability. It was a mixed expression of malice and cunning. Her manner, too, was bold and offensive, like that of one who had been guilty of some known crime and had become reckless. It was only of late she had assumed that tone, and her mistress had observed it among other changes.

"*Que quiere V., señorita?*" (What want you, my lady?)

"Vicenza, I have lost a small piece of paper. It was folded in an oblong shape—not like a letter, but this."

Here a piece of paper, similarly put up, was held up for the inspection of the girl.

"Have you seen anything of it?"

"No, señorita," was the prompt and ready answer.

"Perhaps you may have swept it out, or thrown it into the fire? It looked insignificant, and, indeed, was not of much importance, but there were some patterns upon it I wished to copy. Do you think it has been destroyed?"

"I know not that, señorita. I know that I did not destroy it. I neither swept it out nor threw it into the fire. I should not do that with any paper, as I cannot read myself, and might destroy something that was valuable."

Whatever truth there was in the last part of her harangue, the *mestiza* knew that its earlier declarations were true enough. She had not destroyed it, either by sweeping out or burning.

Her answer was delivered with an ingenuous *naivete*, accompanied with a slight accent of anger, as though she was not overpleased at being suspected of negligence.

Whether her mistress noticed the latter did not appear from her answer, but she expressed herself satisfied.

"It is of no consequence, then," said she. "You may go, Vicenza."

The girl walked off, looking sulky. When her head was just disappearing below the top of the escalera, her face was toward her mistress, whose back was now turned toward her. A scornful pouting of the lips, accompanied by

a demoniac smile, was visible upon it. It was evident from that look that she knew something more of the lost paper than was admitted in her late declaration.

Catalina's gaze was once more turned upon the setting sun. In a few minutes he would disappear behind the snowy ridge of the mountain. Then a few hours, and then—moments of bliss!

Roblado was seated in his cuartel as before. As before, a tiny knock sounded upon the door. As before, he called out, "Quien es?" and was answered, "Yo!" and, as before, he recognized the voice and gave the order for its owner to enter. As before, it was the soldier Jose, who, in a cringing voice and with a cringing salute, approached his officer.

"Well, Jose, what news?"

"Only this," replied the soldier, holding out a slip of paper folded into an oblong shape.

"What is it?" demanded Roblado. "Who is it from?" in the same breath.

"The captain will understand it better than I can, as I can't read; but it comes from the *señorita*, and looks inside like a letter. The *señorita* got it from somebody at church yesterday morning; so thinks Vicenza, for she saw her read it as soon as she got back from morning prayers. Vicenza thinks that the girl Josefa brought it up the valley, but the captain most likely can tell for himself."

Roblado had not listened to half of this talk; but had instead been swallowing the contents of the paper. As soon as he had got to the end of it he sprung from his chair as if a needle had been stuck into him, and paced the room in great agitation.

"Quick! quick, Jose!" he exclaimed. "Send Gomez here. Say nothing to any one. Hold yourself in readiness—I shall want you too. Send Gomez instantly. *Vaya!*"

The soldier made a salute less cringing because more hurried, and precipitately retired from the apartment. Roblado continued—

"By Heaven! this is a piece of luck! Who ever failed to catch a fool when love was his lure? This very night, too, and at midnight! I shall have time to prepare. Oh! if I but knew the place! 'Tis not given here."

Again he read over the note.

"Carajo, no! that is unfortunate. What's to be done? I must not go guessing in the dark! Ha! I have it! She shall be watched!—watched to the very spot! Vicenza can do that while we lie somewhere in ambush. The girl can bring us to it. We shall have time to surround them. Their interview will last long enough for that. We shall take them in the very moment of their bliss. Hell and furies! to think of it—this low dog—this butcher of buffaloes—to thwart me in my purposes! But patience, Roblado! patience! to-night—to-night!"

A knocking at the door. Sergeant Gomez was admitted.

"Gomez, get ready twenty of your men; picked fellows, do you hear? Be ready by eleven o'clock. You have ample time, but see that you be ready the moment I call you. Not a word to any one without. Let the men saddle up and be quiet about it. Load your carbines. There's work for you. You shall know what it is by and by. Go, get ready."

Without saying a word the sergeant went off to obey the order.

"Curses on the luck! if I but knew the place, or anything near it. Would it be about the house, or in the garden? Maybe outside—in the country somewhere? That is not unlikely. He would hardly venture so near the town, lest some one might recognize him or his horse. Death to that horse! No, no! I shall have that horse yet, or I much mistake. Oh! if I could find this place before the hour of meeting, then my game were sure. But no, nothing said of the place—yes, the *old* place. Hell and furies! they have met before—often—often—oh!"

A groan of agony broke from the speaker, and he paced to and fro like one bereft of his senses.

"Shall I tell Vizcarra now," he continued, or wait till it is over? I shall wait. It will be a dainty bit of news along with supper. Perhaps I may garnish the table with the ears of the cibolero. Ha! ha! ha!"

And uttering a diabolical laugh, the ruffian took down his saber and buckled the belt around his waist. He then armed himself with a pair of heavy pistols; and, after looking to the straps of his spurs, strode out of the room.

CHAPTER XXVI.

It wanted but an hour of midnight. There was a moon in the sky, but so near the horizon that the bluff bounding the southern side of the valley threw out a shadow to the distance of many yards upon the plain.

Parallel to the line of the cliffs, and close in to their base, a horseman could be seen advancing up the valley from the lower end of the settlement. His cautious pace, and the anxious glances which he at intervals cast before him, showed that he was traveling with some apprehension, and was desirous of remaining unseen. It was evident, too, that this was his object in keeping within the shadow of the

cliff; for on arriving at certain points where the precipice became slanting and cast no shadow, he would halt for a while, and after carefully reconnoitering the ground, pass rapidly over it. Concealment could be his only object in thus closely hugging the bluffs, for a much better road could have been found at a little distance out from them.

After traveling for many miles in this way, the horseman at length arrived opposite the town, which still, however, was three miles distant from the cliff. From this point a road led off to the town, communicating between it and a pass up the bluffs to the left.

The horseman halted, and gazed awhile along the road, as if undecided whether to take it or not. Having resolved in the negative he moved on, and rode nearly a mile further under the shadow of the bluffs. Again he halted, and scanned the country to his right. A bridle-path seemed to run in the direction of the town, or toward a point somewhat above it. After a short examination the horseman seemed to recognize this path as the one he was in search of, and, heading his horse into it, he parted from the shadow of the bluffs, and rode out under the full moonlight. This, shining down upon him, showed a young man of fine proportions, dressed in ranchero costume, and mounted upon a noble steed, whose sleek black coat glittered under the silvery light. It was easy to know the rider. His bright complexion and light-colored hair, curling thickly under the brim of his sombrero, were characteristics not to be mistaken in that land of dark faces. He was Carlos the cibolero. It could be seen now that a large wolf-like dog trotted near the heels of the horse. The dog was Cibolo.

Advancing in the direction of the town, the caution of the horseman seemed to increase.

The country before him was not quite open. It was level; but fortunately for him, its surface was studded with copse-like islands of timber, and here and there straggling patches of chaparral through which the path led. Before entering these the dog preceded him, but without noise or bark; and when emerging into the open plain again, the horseman each time halted and scanned the ground that separated him from the next copse, before attempting to pass over it.

Proceeding in this way, he arrived at length within several hundred yards of the outskirts of the town, and could see the walls, with the church cupola shining over the top of the trees. One line of wall on which his eyes were fixed lay nearer than the rest. He recognized its outline. It was the parapet over the house of Don Ambrosio—in the rear of which he had now arrived.

He halted in a small copse of timber, the last upon the plain. Beyond, in the direction of Don Ambrosio's house, the ground was open and level up to the bank of the stream already described as running along the bottom of the garden. The tract was a meadow belonging to Don Ambrosio, and used for pasturing the horses of his establishment. It was accessible to these by means of a rude bridge that crossed the stream outside the walls of the garden. Another bridge, however, joined the garden itself to the meadow. This was much slighter and of neater construction—intended only for foot-passengers. It was, in fact, a mere private bridge, by which the fair daughter of Don Ambrosio could cross to enjoy her walk in the pleasant meadow beyond. Upon this little bridge, at its middle part, was a gate with lock and key, to keep intruders from entering the precincts of the garden.

This bridge was not over three hundred yards from the copse in which Carlos had halted, and nothing intervened but the darkness to prevent him from having a view of it. However, as the moon was still up, he could distinctly see the tall posterns, and light colored railings of the gate, glimmering in her light. The stream he could not see—as at this point it ran between high banks—and the garden itself was hidden from view by the grove of cottonwoods and china-trees growing along its bottom.

After arriving in the copse Carlos dismounted; and having led his horse into the darkest shadow of the trees, there left him. He did not tie him to anything, but merely rested the bridle over the pommel of the saddle, so that it might not draggle upon the ground. He had long ago trained the noble animal to remain where he was placed without other fastening than this.

This arrangement completed, he walked forward to the edge of the underwood, and there stood with his eyes fixed upon the bridge and the dark grove beyond it. It was not the first time for him to go through all the maneuvers here described—no, not by many—but, perhaps, on no other occasion were his emotions so strong and strange as on the present.

He had prepared himself for the interview he was now expecting—he had promised himself a frankness of speech his modesty had never before permitted him to indulge in—he had resolved on proposals—the rejection or acceptance of which might determine his future fate. His heart beat within his breast so as to be audible to his own ears.

Perfect stillness reigned through the town. The inhabitants had all retired to their beds, and not a light appeared from door or window. All were close shut and fast bolted. No one appeared in the streets, except the half-dozen "serenos" who formed the night-watch of the place. These could be seen muffled up in their dark cloaks, sitting half asleep on the banquetas of houses, and grasping in one hand their huge halberds, while their lanterns rested upon the pavements at their feet.

Perfect stillness reigned around the mansion of Don Ambrosio. The great gate of the zaguan was closed and barred, and the portero had retired within his "lodge," thus signifying that all the inmates of the dwelling had returned home. If silence denoted sleep, all were asleep; but a ray of light escaping through the silken curtains of a glass door, and falling dimly upon the pavement of the patio, showed that one at least still kept vigil. That light proceeded from the chamber of Catalina.

All at once the stillness of the night was broken by the loud tolling of a bell. It was the clock of the parroquia announcing the hour of midnight.

The last stroke had not ceased to reverberate when the light in the chamber appeared to be suddenly extinguished—for it no longer glowed through the curtain.

Shortly after, the glass door was silently opened from the inside; and a female form closely muffled came forth, and glided with stealthy and sinuous step around the shadowy side of the patio. The tall elegant figure could not be hidden by the disguise of the ample cloak in which it was muffled, and the graceful gait appeared even when constrained and stealthy. It was the senorita herself.

Having passed round the patio, she entered the avenue that led to the garden. Here a heavy door barred the egress from the house, and before this she stopped. Only a moment. A key appeared from under her cloak, and the large bolt with some difficulty yielded to her woman's strength. It did not yield silently. The rusty iron sounded as it sprang back into the lock, causing her to start and tremble. She even returned back through the avenue, to make sure whether any one had heard it; and, standing in the dark entrance, glanced round the patio. Had she not heard a door closing as she came back? She fancied so; and alarmed by it, she stood for some time gazing upon the different doors that opened upon the court. They were all close shut, her own not excepted, for she had closed it on coming out. Still her fancy troubled her, and, but half satisfied, she returned to the gate.

This she opened with caution, and, passing through, traversed the rest of the avenue, and came out in the open ground. Keeping under the shadow of the trees and shrubbery, she soon reached the grove at the bottom of the garden. Here she paused for a moment, and, looking through the stems of the trees, scanned the open surface in the direction of the copse where Carlos had halted.

No object was visible but the outlines of the timber island itself, under whose shadow a human form in dark clothing could not have been recognized at such a distance.

After pausing a moment she glided among the trees of the grove, and the next moment stood upon the center and highest point of the bridge in front of the little gate. Here she again stopped, drew from under her cloak a white cambric handkerchief, and, raising herself to her full height, held it spread out between her hands.

The air was filled with fire-flies, whose lights sparkled thickly against the dark background of the copsewood; but these did not prevent her from distinguishing a brighter flash, like the snapping of a lucifer-match, that appeared among them. Her signal was answered!

She lowered the handkerchief, and taking out a small key, applied it to the lock of the gate. This was undone in a second, and, having thrown open the wicket, she retired within the shadow of the grove and stood waiting.

Even in that dark shadow her eyes sparkled with the light of love, as she saw a form—the form of a man on foot, parting from the copse, and coming in the direction of the bridge. It was to her the dearest on earth; and she awaited the approach with a flushed cheek and a heart full of joyful emotion.

CHAPTER XXIX.

It was no fancy of Catalina's that she heard the shutting of a door as she returned up the avenue. A door in reality had been closed at that moment—the door that led to the sleeping apartments of the maid servants. Had her steps been quicker, she might have seen some one rush across the patio and enter this door. But she arrived too late for this. The door was closed, and all was silent again. It might have been fancy, thought she.

It was no fancy. From the hour when the family had retired to rest, the door of Catalina's chamber had been watched. An eye had been bent all the time upon that ray of light es-

caping through the curtained glass—the eye of the girl Vicenza.

During the early part of the evening the maid had asked leave to go out for a while. It had been granted. She had been gone for nearly an hour. Conducted by the soldier Jose, she had had an interview with Roblado. At that interview all had been arranged between them.

She was to watch her mistress from the house and follow her to the place of assignation. When that should be determined, she was to return with all haste to Roblado—who appointed a place of meeting her—and then guide him and his troop to the lovers. This, thought Roblado, would be the surest plan to proceed upon. He had taken his measures accordingly.

The door of the maid's sleeping-room was just opposite that of Catalina's chamber. Through the key-hole the girl had seen the light go out, and the senorita gliding around the patio. She had watched her into the avenue, and then, gently opening her own door, had stolen after her.

At the moment the senorita had succeeded in unlocking the great gate of the garden the mestiza was peeping around the wall at the entrance of the avenue; but, on hearing the other return—for it was by the sound of her footsteps she was warned—the wily spy had darted back into her room and closed the door behind her.

It was some time before she dared venture out again, as the keyhole no longer did her any service. She kept her eye to it, however, and, seeing that her mistress did not return to her chamber, she concluded that the latter had continued on into the garden. Again gently opening her door, she stole forth, and, on tiptoe approaching the avenue, peeped into it. It was no longer dark. The gate was open, and the moon shining in lit up the whole passage. It was evident, therefore, that the senorita had gone through and was now in the garden.

Was she in the garden? The mestiza remembered the bridge, and knew that her mistress carried the key of the wicket and often used it both by day and night. She might by this have crossed the bridge, and got far beyond into the open country. She—the spy—might not find the direction she had taken, and thus spoil the whole plan.

With these thoughts passing through her mind, the girl hurried through the avenue, and, crouching down, hastened along the walk as fast as she was able.

Seeing no one among the fruit-trees and flower-beds, she began to despair; but the thick grove at the bottom of the garden gave her promise—that was a likely place of meeting—capital for such a purpose, as the mestiza, experienced in such matters, well knew.

To approach the grove, however, presented a difficulty. There was a space of open ground—a green parterre—between it and the flower-beds. Any one, already in the grove, could perceive the approach of another in that direction, and especially under a bright moonlight. This the mestiza saw, and it compelled her to pause and reflect how she was to get nearer.

But one chance seemed to offer. The high adobe wall threw a shadow of some feet along one side of the open ground. In this shadow it might be possible to reach the timber unobserved. The girl resolved to attempt it.

Guided by the instinctive cunning of her race, she dropped down flat upon her breast; and, dragging herself over the grass, she reached the selvage of the grove, just in the rear of the arbor. There she paused, raised her head, and glanced through the leafy screen that encircled the arbor. She saw what she desired.

Catalina was at this moment upon the bridge, and above the position of the mestiza, so that the latter could perceive her form outlined against the blue of the sky. She saw her hold aloft the white kerchief. She guessed that it was a signal. She saw the flash in answer to it, and then observed her mistress undo the lock and fling the wicket open.

The cunning spy was now sure that the place of meeting was to be the grove itself, and might have returned with that information; but Roblado had distinctly ordered her not to leave until she saw the meeting itself, and was certain of the spot. She therefore remained where she was, and awaited the further proceedings of the lovers.

Carlos, on perceiving the signal, had answered it by flashing some powder already prepared. He lost no time in obeying the well-known summons. A single moment by the side of his horse, a whisper which the latter well understood, and he parted from the copse, Cibolo following at his heels.

On reaching the end of the bridge he bent down, and, addressing some words in a low voice to the dog, proceeded to cross over. The animal did not follow him, but lay down on the opposite bank of the stream.

The next moment the lovers were together.

From the spot where she lay the mestiza witnessed their greeting. The moon shone upon their faces; the fair skin and curly locks of Carlos were distinctly visible under the light. The girl knew the cibolero—it was he.

She had seen all that was necessary for Ro-

blado to know. The grove was the place of meeting. It only remained for her to get back to the officer and give the information.

She was about to crawl away, and had already half risen, when to her dismay the lovers appeared coming through the grove and toward the very arbor behind which she lay!

Their faces were turned toward the spot where she was crouching. If she rose to her feet or attempted to go off she could not fail to be seen by one or other of them.

She had no alternative but to remain where she was, at least until some better opportunity offered of getting away; and with this intention she again squatted down close under the shadow of the arbor.

A moment after the lovers entered and seated themselves upon the benches with which the little bower was provided.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE hearts of both were so agitated that for some moments neither gave utterance to their thoughts. Catalina was the first to speak.

"Your sister?" she inquired.

"She is better. I have had the rancho restored. They have returned to it, and the old scenes seem to have worked a miracle upon her. Her senses came at once, and relapse only at long intervals. I have hopes it will be all well again."

"I am glad to hear this. Poor child! she must have suffered sadly in the hands of those rude savages."

"Rude savages! Ay, Catalina, you have styled them appropriately enough, though you little know of whom you are speaking."

"Of whom?" echoed the lady, in surprise. Up to this moment even she had no other than the popular and universal belief that Carlos's sister had been a captive in the hands of the Indians!

"It was partly for this that I have sought an interview to-night. I could not exist without explaining to you my late conduct, which must have appeared to you a mystery. It shall be so no longer. Hear me, Catalina!"

Carlos revealed the horrid plot, detailing every circumstance, to the utter astonishment of his fair companion.

"Oh, fiends! fiends!" she exclaimed; "who could have imagined such atrocity? Who would suppose that on the earth were wretches like these? But that you, dear Carlos, have told me, I could not have believed in such villainy! I knew that both were bad; I have heard many a tale of the villainess of these two men; but this is wickedness beyond the power of fancy! *Santissima Madre!* what men! what monsters! It is incredible!"

"You know now with what justice I am called a murderer?"

"Oh, dear Carlos! think not of that. I never gave it a thought. I knew you had some cause just and good. Fear not! The world shall yet know all—"

"The world!" interrupted Carlos, with a sneer. "For me there is no world. I have no home. Even among those with whom I have been brought up I have been but a stranger—a heretic outcast. Now I am worse—a hunted outlaw with a price upon my head, and a good large one too. In truth, I never thought I was worth so much before." Here a laugh escaped from the speaker; but his merriment was of short duration. He continued:

"No world have I but you, Catalina—and you no longer except in my heart. I must leave you and go far away. Death—worse than death—awaits me here. I must go hence. I must return to the people from whom my parents are sprung—to our long-forgotten kindred. Perhaps there I may find a new home and new friends, but happiness I cannot without you—No, never!"

Catalina was silent, with tearful eyes bent upon the ground. She trembled at the thought that was passing in her mind. She feared to give it expression. But it was no time for the affectation of false modesty, for idle bashfulness; and neither were her characteristics. Upon a single word depended the happiness of her life—of her lover's. Away with womanly coyness! let the thought be spoken!

She turned toward her lover, took his hand in hers, leaned forward till her lips were close to his, and looking in his face, said in a soft, but firm voice:

"Carlos! is it your wish that I go with you?"

In a moment his arms were around her, and their lips had met.

"Oh, heavens!" he exclaimed; "is this possible? do I hear aright? Dearest Catalina! it was this I would have proposed, but I dared not do it! I feared to make the proposal, so wild does it seem. What! forsake all for me? Oh, *querida!* *querida!* Tell me that this is what your words mean! Say you will go with me!"

"I will!" was the short but firm reply.

"Oh, God! I am too happy—a week of terrible suffering, and I am again happy. But a week ago, Catalina, and I was happy. I had met with a strange adventure, one that promised fortune. I was full of hope—hope of winning you; not you, *querida*, but your father. Of winning him by gold. See!" Here the speaker held forth his hand filled with shining ore. "It

is gold. Of this I have discovered a mine, and I had hoped with it to have rivaled your father in his wealth, and then to have won his consent. Alas! alas! that is now hopeless, but your words have given me new happiness. Think not of the fortune you leave behind. I know you do not, dear Catalina. I shall give you one equal to it—perhaps far greater. I know where this precious trash is to be procured, but I shall tell you all when we have time. To-night—"

He was interrupted by Catalina. Her quick ear had caught a sound that appeared odd to her. It was but a slight rustling among the leaves near the back of the arbor, and might have been caused by the wind, had there been any. But not a breath was stirring. Something else had caused it. What could it be?

After a moment or two both stepped out, and examined the bushes whence the sound was supposed to have proceeded; but nothing was to be seen. They looked around and up toward the garden—there was no appearance of anything that could have caused the noise! It was now much darker than when they had entered the arbor. The moon had gone down, and the silvery light had turned to gray; but it was still clear enough to have distinguished any large object at several yards' distance. Catalina could not be mistaken. She had heard a rustling sound to a certainty. Could it have been the dog? Carlos stepped forward on the bridge. It was not—the animal lay still where he had been placed; it could not have been he! What then? Some lizard? perhaps a dangerous serpent?

At all events they would not again enter the arbor, but remained standing outside. Still Catalina was not without apprehensions, for she now remembered the loss of the note, and later still, the shutting of the door, both of which she hastily communicated to her companion.

Hitherto Carlos had paid but little attention to what he believed to be some natural occurrence—the fluttering of a bird which had been disturbed by them, or the gliding of a snake or lizard. But the information now given made a different impression upon him. Used to Indian wiles, he was a ready reasoner, and he perceived at once that there might be something sinister in the sound which had been heard. He resolved, therefore, to examine the ground more carefully.

Once more he proceeded to the back of the arbor, and dropping to his knees, scanned the grass and bushes. In a moment he raised his head with an exclamation of surprise.

"As I live, Catalina, you were right! Some one has been here, beyond a doubt! Some one has lain on this very spot! Where can they have gone to? By Heaven, it was a woman! Here is the trail of her dress!"

"Vicenza!" exclaimed the lady. "It can be no other—my maid, Vicenza! *Dios de mi alma!* she has heard every word!"

"No doubt it was Vicenza. She has watched and followed you from the house. What could have tempted her to such an act?"

"*Ay de mí!* Heaven only knows; her conduct has been very strange of late. It is quite annoying! Dear Carlos!" she continued, changing her tone of regret to one of anxiety, "you must stay no longer. Who knows what she may do? Perhaps summon my father! Perhaps still worse—*Santissima Virgen!* may it not be!"

Here Catalina hastily communicated the fact of Vicenza's intimacy with the soldier, Jose, as well as other circumstances relating to the girl, and urged upon her lover the necessity of instant departure.

"I shall go then," said he. "Not that I much fear them; it is too dark for their carbines, and their sabers will never reach me, while my brave steed stands yonder ready to obey my call. But it is better for me to go. There may be something in it. I cannot explain curiosity that attempts so much as this girl. I shall go at once then."

And so Carlos had resolved. But much remained to be said; fresh vows of love to be pronounced; an hour to be fixed for a future meeting—perhaps the last before taking the final step—their flight across the great plain.

More than once had Carlos placed his foot upon the bridge and more than once had he returned to have another sweet word—another parting kiss.

The final "adios" had at length been exchanged; the lovers had parted from each other; Catalina had turned toward the house, and Carlos was advancing to the bridge with the intention of crossing, when a growl from Cibolo caused him to halt and listen.

Again the dog growled, this time more fiercely, following with a series of earnest barks, that told his master some danger was nigh.

The first thought of the latter was to rush across the bridge and make toward his steed. Had he done so, he would have had time enough to escape; but the desire to warn her, so that she might hasten to the house, impelled him to turn back through the grove. She had already reached the open parterre, and was crossing it, when the barking of the dog caused her to stop,

and the moment after Carlos came up. But he had not addressed a word to her before the trampling of horses sounded outside the adobe walls of the garden—horsemen galloped down on both sides, while the confused striking of hoofs showed that some were halting outside, while others deployed around the inclosure. The rattling of the timbers of the large bridge was heard almost at the same instant; then the dog breaking into a fierce attack; and then, through the stems of the trees, the dark forms of horsemen became visible upon the opposite bank of the stream. The garden was surrounded!

CHAPTER XXXI.

LONG after the lovers had entered the arbor the mestiza had remained in her squatting attitude, listening to the conversation, of which not a word escaped her. It was not, however, her interest in that which bound her to the spot, but her fear of being discovered should she attempt to leave it. She had reason while it was still moonlight, for the open ground she must pass over was distinctly visible from the arbor. It was only after the moon went down that she saw the prospect of retiring unseen; and, choosing a moment when the lovers had their faces turned from her, she crawled a few yards back, rose to her feet, and ran nimbly off in the darkness.

Strange to say, the rustling heard by the senorita was not made by the girl at the moment of her leaving the arbor. It was caused by a twig which she had bent behind a branch, the better to conceal herself, and this releasing itself had sprung back to its place. That was why no object was visible to the lovers, although coming hastily out of the arbor. The spy at that instant was beyond the reach of sight as well as hearing. She had got through the avenue before the twig moved.

She did not stop for a moment. She did not return to her apartment, but crossing the patio hastily entered the zaguan. This she traversed with stealthy steps, as if afraid to awake the portero.

On reaching the gate she drew from her pocket a key. It was not the key of the main lock, but of the lesser one, belonging to the postern door which opened through the great gate.

This key she had secured at an earlier hour of the evening, for the very use she was now about to make of it.

She placed it in the lock, and then shot the bolt, using all the care she could to prevent it from making a noise. She raised the latch with like caution; and then, opening the door, stepped gently to the outside. She next closed the door after her, slowly and silently; and this done, she ran with all her speed along the road toward some woods that were outside the town, and not far from the house of Don Ambrosio.

It was in these woods that Roblado held his men in ambush. He had brought them thither at a late hour, and by a circuitous route, so that no one should see them as they entered the timber, and thus prevent the possibility of a frustration of his plans. Here he was waiting the arrival of his spy.

The girl soon reached the spot, and in a few minutes detailed to the officer the whole of what she had witnessed. What she had heard there was no time to tell, for she communicated to Roblado how she had been detained, and the latter saw there was not a moment to be lost. The interview might end before he should be ready, and his prey might still escape him.

Had Roblado felt more confidence as to time he would now have acted differently. He would have sent some men by a lower crossing, and let them approach the bottom of the garden directly from the meadow; he would, moreover, have spent more time and caution about the "surround."

But he saw he might be too late, should he adopt this surer course. A quicker one recommended itself, and he at once gave the orders to his followers. These were divided into two parties of different sizes. Each was to take a side of the garden, and deploy along the wall, but the larger party was to drop only a few of its men, while the rest were to ride hastily over the greater bridge, and gallop round to the bottom of the garden. Roblado himself was to lead this party, whose duty would likely be of most importance. As the leader well knew, the garden walls could not be scaled without a ladder, and the cibolero, if found within the garden, would attempt to escape by the bridge at the bottom. Lest he might endeavor to get through the avenue and off by the front of the house, the girl Vicenza was to conduct Gomez with several men on foot through the patio, and guide them to the avenue entrance.

The plan was well enough conceived. Roblado knew the ground well. He had often strolled through that garden, and its walls and approaches were perfectly familiar to him. Should he be enabled to surround it before the cibolero could get notice of their approach, he was sure of his victim. The latter must either be killed or captured.

In five minutes after the arrival of the spy he had communicated the whole of their duties

to the men; and in five minutes more they had ridden out of the woods, crossed the small tract that separated them from the house, and were in the act of surrounding the garden! It was at this moment that the dog Cibolo first uttered his growl of alarm.

"Fly—fly!" cried Catalina as she saw her lover approach. "Oh! do not think of me! They dare not take my life. I have committed no offense. Oh, Carlos, leave me! fly! *Madre de Dios!* they come this way!"

As she spoke a number of dark forms were seen from the avenue, and coming down the garden. Their scabbards clanked among the bushes as they rushed through them. They were soldiers on foot! Several remained by the entrance, while the rest went forward.

Carlos had for a moment contemplated escape in that direction. It occurred to him, if he could get up to the house and on the azotea, he might drop off on either side, and, favored by the darkness, return to the meadow at some distant point. This idea vanished the moment he saw that the entrance was occupied. He glanced to the walls. They were too high to be scaled. He would be attacked while attempting it. No other chance offered but to cut his way through by the bridge. He now saw the error he had committed in returning. She was in no danger—at least in no peril of her life. Indeed her greater danger would arise from his remaining near her. He should have crossed the bridge at first. He was now separated from his horse. He might summon the latter by his call—he knew that—but it would only bring the noble animal within reach of his foes—perhaps to be captured. That would be as much as taking his own life. No; he could not summon his steed from where he was, and he did not utter the signal. What was he to do? To remain by the side of Catalina, to be surrounded and captured, perhaps cut down like a dog? To imperil her life as well?—No. He must make a desperate struggle to go out of the inclosure, to reach the open country if possible, and then—

His thoughts went no further. He cried out,—

"Querida, farewell! I must leave you—do not despair. If I die, I shall carry your love to heaven! Farewell, farewell!"

These words were uttered in the parting haste of the moment, and he had sprung away so suddenly that he did not hear the answering farewell.

The moment he was gone the lady dropped to her knees, and with hands clasped, and eyes raised to heaven, offered her prayer for his safety.

Half-a-dozen springs brought Carlos once more under the shadow of the grove. He saw his foes on the opposite bank, and from their voices he could tell there were many of them. They were talking loudly and shouting directions to one another. He could distinguish the voice of Roblado above the rest. He was calling upon some of the men to dismount and follow him over the bridge. He was himself on foot, for the purpose of crossing.

Carlos saw no other prospect of escape than by making a quick rush across the bridge, and by cutting his way through the crowd. By that means he might reach the open plain, and fight his way until his horse could come up. Once in the saddle he would have laughed at their attempts to take him. It was a desperate resolve,—a perilous running of the gantlet,—almost certain death: but still more certain death was the alternative if he remained where he was.

There was no time for hesitation. Already several men had dismounted, and were making toward the bridge. He must cross before they had reached it, one was already upon it. He must be beaten back.

Carlos, cocking his pistol, rushed forward to the gate. The man had reached it from the other side. They met face to face, with the gate still shut between them. Carlos saw that his antagonist was Roblado himself!

Not a word was spoken between them. Roblado also had his pistol in readiness and fired first, but missed his aim. He perceived this, and, dreading the fire from his adversary, he staggered back to the bank, shouting to his followers to discharge their carbines.

Before they could obey the order, the crack of the cibolero's pistol rung upon the air, and Roblado, with a loud oath, rolled down by the edge of the water. Carlos dashed open the gate, and was about to rush onward, when he perceived through the smoke and darkness several carbines brought to the level, and aimed at him. A sudden thought came into his mind, and he changed his design of crossing the bridge. The time was but the pulling of a trigger, but, short as it was, he effected his purpose. The carbines blazed and cracked, all nearly at the same instant, and when the smoke cleared away Carlos was no longer on the bridge! Had he gone back into the garden? No—already half-a-dozen men had cut off his retreat in that direction!

"He is killed!" cried several voices, "Carajo!—he has fallen into the river! *Mira!*"

All eyes were turned upon the stream. Certainly a body had plunged into it, as the bub-

bles and circling waves testified, but only these were to be seen!

"He has sunk! he's gone to the bottom!" cried some.

"Be sure he hasn't swum away!" counseled a voice; and several ran along the banks with their eyes searching the surface.

"Impossible! there are no waves."

"He could not have passed here," said one who stood a little below the bridge. "I have been watching the water."

"So have I," cried another from above. "He has not passed my position."

"Then he is dead and gone down!"

"Carajo! let us fish him out!"

And they were proceeding to put this idea into execution, when Roblado, who had now got to his feet, finding that a wounded arm was all he had suffered, ordered them to desist.

"Up and down!" he thundered; "scatter both ways—quick, or he may yet escape us. Go!"

The men did as they were ordered, but the party who turned down-stream halted through sheer surprise. The figure of a man was seen, in a bent attitude and crawling up the bank, at a distance of a hundred yards below. The next moment it rose into an erect position, and glided over the plain with lightning speed, in the direction of the copse of timber!

"*Hola!*" exclaimed several voices; "yonder he goes! *Por todos santos*, it is he!"

Amid the cracking of carbines that followed, a shrill whistle was heard; and before any of the mounted men could ride forward, a horse was seen shooting out from the copse and meeting the man upon the open meadow! Quick as thought the latter vaulted into the saddle, and after uttering a wild and scornful laugh galloped off, and soon disappeared in the darkness!

Most of the dragoons sprung upon their horses and followed; but after a short gallop over the plain they gave up the chase, and one by one returned to their wounded leader.

To say that Roblado was furious would be to characterize very faintly the state he was in. But he had still one captive on which to vent his rage and chagrin.

Catalina had been captured in the garden, taken while praying for the safe escape of her lover. Jose had remained in charge of her, while the rest rushed down to assist in the capture of Carlos, at which Jose, knowing the cibolero as he did, and not being over brave, evinced no desire to be present.

Catalina heard the shots and shouts that denoted the terrible struggle. She had heard, too, the shrill whistle and scornful laugh that rung loudly above the din. She had heard the shouts of the pursuers dying away in the distance.

Her heart beat with joy. She knew that her lover was free!

She thought then, and then only, of herself. She thought, too, of escape. She knew the rude taunts she would have to listen to from the brutal leader of these miscreants. What could she do to avoid an encounter? She had but one to deal with—Jose. She knew the despicable character of the man. Would gold tempt him? She would make the trial.

It was made, and succeeded. The large sum offered was irresistible. The villain knew that there could be no great punishment for letting go a captive who could at any time be taken again. He would risk the chances of his captain's displeasure for such a sum. His captain might have reasons for not dealing too severely with him. The purse was paid, and the lady was allowed to go.

She was to close the door, locking it from the inside, as though she had escaped by flight; and this direction of Jose was followed to the letter.

As Roblado crossed the bridge he was met by the soldier, who, breathless and stammering, announced that the fair prisoner had got into the house. She had slipped from his side and ran off. Had it been an ordinary captive, he could have fired upon her; but he was unable to overtake her until she had passed the door, which was closed and locked before he could get near.

For a moment Roblado hesitated whether to "storm the house." His rage almost induced him to the act. He reflected, however, that the proceeding might appear somewhat ridiculous, and could not much better his position; besides, the pain of his wounded arm admonished him to retire from the field.

He recrossed the bridge, was helped upon his horse, and, summoning around him his valiant troop, he rode back to the Presidio—leaving the roused town to conjecture the cause of the alarm.

CHAPTER XXXII.

NEXT morning the town was full of "novedades." At first it was supposed there had been an attack of Indians repelled as usual by the troops. What valiant protectors the people had!

After a while it was rumored that Carlos the murderer had been captured, and that was the

cause of the firing—that Captain Roblado was killed in the affair. Presently Carlos was not taken, but he had been chased, and came very near being taken! Roblado had engaged him singly, hand to hand, and had wounded him, but in the darkness he had got off by diving down the river. In the encounter the outlaw had shot the captain through the arm, which prevented the latter from making him a prisoner.

This rumor came direct from the Presidio. It was partly true. The wounding of Carlos by Roblado was an addition to the truth, intended to give a little *eclat* to the latter, for it became known afterward that the cibolero had escaped without even a scratch.

People wondered why the outlaw should have ventured to approach the town, knowing as he did that there was a price upon his head. Some very powerful motive must have drawn him thither. The motive soon became known—the whole story leaked out; and then, indeed, did scandal enjoy a feast. Catalina had been for some time the acknowledged belle of the place, and, what with envious women and jealous men, she was now treated with slight show of charity. The very blackest construction was put upon her "compromiso." It was worse even than a *mesalliance*. The "society" were horrified at her conduct in stooping to intimacy with a "lepero," while even the lepero class, itself fanatically religious, condemned her for her association with "un asesino," but, still worse, a "heretico."

The excitement produced by this new affair was great indeed—a perfect panic. The cibolero's head rose in value, like the funds. The magistrates and principal men assembled in the Casa de Cabildo. A new proclamation was drawn out; a larger sum was offered for the capture of Carlos, and the document was rendered still stronger by a declaration of severe punishment to all who should give him food or protection. If captured beneath the roof of any citizen who had voluntarily sheltered him, the latter was to suffer full confiscation of his property, besides such further punishment as might be fixed upon.

The Church was not silent. The padres promised excommunication and the wrath of Heaven against those who would stay justice from the heretic murderer!

These were terrible terms for the outlaw! Fortunate for him, he knew how to live without a roof over his head. He could maintain existence where his enemies would have starved, and where they were unable to follow him—on the wide desert plain, or in the rocky ravines of the mountains. Had he depended for food or shelter on his fellow-citizens of the settlement, he would soon have met with betrayal and denouncement. But the cibolero was as independent of such a necessity as the wild savage of the prairies. He could sleep on the grassy sward or the naked rock, he could draw sustenance even from the arid surface of the Llano Estacado, and there he could bid defiance to a whole army of pursuers.

At the council Don Ambrosio was not present. Grief and rage kept him within doors. A stormy scene had been enacted between him and his daughter. Henceforth she was to be strictly guarded—to be kept a prisoner in her father's house—to be taught repentance by the exercise of penance.

To describe the feelings of Roblado and the comandante would be impossible. These gentlemen were well-nigh at their wits' end with mortification. Disappointment, humiliation, physical and moral pain, had worked them into a frenzy of rage; and they were engaged together during all the day in plotting schemes and plans for the capture of their outlawed enemy.

Roblado was not less earnest than the comandante for the success of their endeavors.

Carlos had now given both of them good cause to hate him, and both hated him from the bottom of their hearts.

What vexed Roblado most was, that he was no longer able to take the field, nor was he likely to be for several weeks. His wound, though not dangerous, would oblige him to sling his arm for some time, and to manage a horse would be out of the question. The strategic designs of the comandante and himself would have to be carried out by those who felt far less interest in the capture of the outlaw than they did. Indeed, but for the arrival of a brace of lieutenants, sent from division headquarters at Santa Fe, the garrison would have been without a commissioned officer fit for duty. These new-comers—Lieutenants Yanez and Ortega—were neither of them the men to catch the cibolero. They were brave enough—Ortega in particular—but both were late arrivals from Spain, and knew nothing whatever of border warfare.

The soldiers were desirous of hunting the outlaw down, and acted with sufficient zeal. The stimulus of a large reward, which was promised to them, rendered them eager of effecting his capture; and they went forth on each fresh scout with alacrity. But they were not likely to attack the cibolero unless a goodly number of them were together. No one or two of them

—including the celebrated Sergeant Gomez—would venture within range of his rifle, much less go near enough to lay hands upon him.

The actual experience of his prowess by some of them, and the exaggerated reports of it known to others, had made such an impression upon the whole troop that the cibolero could have put a considerable body of them to flight only by showing himself! But in addition to the skill, strength and daring which he had in reality exhibited—in addition to the exaggeration of those qualities by the fancy—the soldiers as well as people had become possessed with a strange belief—that was, that the cibolero was under the protection of his mother—under the protection of the “diablo”—in other words, that he was bewitched, and therefore invincible! Some asserted that he was impervious to shot, spear or saber. Those who had fired their carbines at him while on the bridge fully believed this. They were ready to swear—each one of them—that they had hit the cibolero, and must have killed him had he not been under supernatural protection!

Wonderful stories now circulated among the soldiers and throughout the settlement. The cibolero was seen everywhere, and always mounted on his coal-black horse, who shared his supernatural fame. He had been seen riding along the top of the cliffs at full gallop, and so close to their edge that he might have blown the stump of his cigar into the valley below! Others had met him in the night on lonely paths amid the chaparral, and according to them his face and hands had appeared red and luminous as coals of fire! He had been seen on the high plains by the hateros, on the cliff of “La Nina,” in many parts of the valley; but no one had ventured near enough to exchange words with him. Every one had fled or shunned him. It was even asserted that he had been seen crossing the little bridge that led out of Don Ambrosio’s garden, and thus brought down a fresh shower of scandal on the devoted head of Catalina. The scandal-mongers, however, were sadly disappointed on hearing that this bridge no longer existed, but had been removed by Don Ambrosio on the day following the discovery of his daughter’s misconduct!

In no part of the world is superstition stronger than among the ignorant populace of the settlements of New Mexico. In fact, it may be regarded as forming part of their religion. The missionary padres, in grafting the religion of Rome upon the sun-worship of Quetzalcoatl, admitted for their own purposes a goodly string of superstitions. It would be strange if their people did not believe in others, however absurd. Witchcraft, therefore, and all like things, were among the New Mexicans as much matters of belief as the Deity himself.

It is not then to be wondered at that Carlos the cibolero became associated with the devil. His feats of horsemanship and hair-breadth ‘scapes from his enemies were, to say the least, something wonderful and romantic, even when viewed in a natural sense. But the populace of San Ildefonso no longer regarded them in this light. With them his skill in the “coleo de toros,” in “running the cock,”—his feat of horsemanship on the cliff—his singular escapes from carbine and lance, were no longer due to himself, but to the devil. The “diablo” was at the bottom of all!

If the outlaw appeared so often during the next few days to those who did not wish to see him, it was somewhat strange that those who were desirous of a sight and an interview could get neither one nor the other. The lieutenants, Yanez and Ortiga, with their following of troopers, were on the scout and lookout from morning till night, and from one day’s end to the other. The spies that were thickly set in all parts where there was a probability he might appear, could see nothing of Carlos! To-day he was reported here, to-morrow there; but on tracing these reports to their sources, it usually turned out that some ranchero with a black horse had been taken for him; and thus the troopers were led from place to place, and misled by false reports until both horses and men were nearly worn out in the hopeless pursuit. This, however, had become the sole duty on which the soldiers were employed—as the comandante had no idea of giving up the chase so long as there was a trooper left to take the trail.

One place was closely watched both by day and by night. It was watched by soldiers disguised, and also by spies employed for the purpose. This was the rancho of the cibolero himself. The disguised soldiers and spies were placed around it, in such positions that they could see every movement that took place outside the walls without being themselves seen. These positions they held during the day, taking others at night; and the surveillance was thus continual, by these secret sentries relieving one another. Should the cibolero appear, it was not the duty of the spies to attack him. They were only to communicate with a troop—kept in readiness not far off—that thus insured a sufficient force for the object.

The mother and sister of the cibolero had returned to live in the rancho. The peons had re-roofed and repaired it—an easy task, as the

walls had not been injured by the fire. It was now as comfortable a dwelling as ever.

The mother and sister were not molested—in fact, they were supposed to know nothing of the fact that eyes were continually upon them. But there was a design in this toleration. They were to be narrowly watched in their movements. They were never to leave the rancho without being closely followed, and the circumstance of their going out reported to the leader of the ambushed troop at the moment of its occurrence. These orders were of the strictest kind, and their disobedience threatened with severe punishment.

The reasons for all this were quite simple. Both Vizcarra and Roblado believed, or suspected, that Carlos might leave the settlement altogether—why should he not?—and take both mother and sister along with him. Indeed, why should he not? The place could be no more a home to him, and he would easily find another beyond the Great Plains. No time could ever release him from the ban that hung over him. He could never pay the forfeit of his life—but by that life. It was, therefore, perfectly natural in the two officers to suspect him of the intention of moving elsewhere.

But, reasoned they, so long as we hold the mother and sister as hostages, he will not leave them. He will still continue to lurk around the settlement, and, if not now, some time shall the fox be caught and destroyed.

So reasoned the comandante and his captain, and hence the strictness of their orders about guarding the rancho. Its inmates were really prisoners, though—as Vizcarra and Roblado supposed—they were ignorant of the fact.

Notwithstanding all their ingenious plans—notwithstanding all their spies, and scouts, and soldiers—notwithstanding their promises of reward and threats of punishment—day followed day, and still the outlaw remained at large.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

It was on the morning of a Sunday, and the people were just coming out of the church, when a horseman, covered with sweat and dust, galloped into the plaza. His habiliments were those of a sergeant of dragoons; and all easily recognized the well-known lineaments of the sergeant Gomez.

In a few moments he was surrounded by a crowd of idlers, who, although it was Sunday, were heard a few minutes after breaking out into loud acclamations of joy. Hats were up-tossed and *vivas* rent the air.

What news had Gomez announced? A rare bit of news—the capture of the outlaw! It was true. Carlos had been taken, and was now a prisoner in the hands of the soldiers. He had been captured neither by strength nor stratagem. Treachery had done the work. He had been betrayed by one of his own people.

It was thus his capture had been effected. Despairing for the present of being able to communicate with Catalina, he had formed the resolution to remove his mother and sister from the valley. He had prepared a temporary home for them far off in the wilderness, where they would be secure from his enemies, while he himself could return at a better opportunity.

To effect their removal, watched as they were, he knew would be no easy matter. But he had taken his measures, and would have succeeded had it not been for treason. One of his own people—a peon who had accompanied him in his last expedition—betrayed him to his vigilant foes.

Carlos was within the rancho making a few hasty preparations for the journey. He had left his horse hidden some distance off in the chaparral. Unfortunately for him Cibolo was not there. To a peon had been assigned the duty that would otherwise have been intrusted to him—that of keeping watch without.

This wretch had been previously bought by Roblado and Vizcarra. The result was that, instead of acting as sentinel for his master, he hastened to warn his enemies. The rancho was surrounded by a troop; and although several of the assailants were killed by the hand of Carlos, he himself was finally overpowered and taken.

Gomez had not been five minutes in the plaza when a bugle was heard sounding the advance of a troop, which the next moment defiled into the open square. Near its middle was the prisoner, securely tied upon the back of a saddle-mule, and guarded by a double file of troopers.

An arrival of such interest was soon known, and the plaza became filled with a crowd eager to gratify its curiosity by a sight of the notorious cibolero.

But he was not the only one upon whom the people gazed with curiosity. There were two other prisoners—one of whom was regarded with an interest equal to that felt at the sight of the outlaw himself. This prisoner was his mother. Upon her the eyes of the multitude turned with an expression of awe mingled with indignation; while jeering and angry cries hailed her as she passed on her way to the Calabozo.

“*Muera la hechicera! muera!*” (Death to

the witch—let her die!) broke from ruffian lips as she was carried along.

Even the disheveled hair and weeping eyes of her young companion—her daughter—failed to touch the hearts of that fanatical mob, and there were some who cried, “*Mueran las dos! madre y hija!*” (Let both die—mother and daughter!)

The guard had even to protect them from rude assault, as they were thrust hastily within the door of the prison!

Fortunately Carlos saw naught of this. He was not even aware that they were prisoners! He thought, perhaps, they had been left unmolested in the rancho, and that the vengeance of his enemies extended no further than to himself. He knew not the fiendish designs of his persecutors.

The female prisoners remained in the Calabozo. Carlos, for better security, was carried on to the Presidio and placed in the prison of the guard-house.

That night he received a visit. The comandante and Roblado could not restrain their dastard spirits from indulging in the luxury of revenge. Having emptied their wine-cups, they, with a party of boon companions, entered the guard prison and amused themselves by taunting the chained captive. Every insult was put upon him by his half-drunken visitors—every rudeness their ingenuity could devise.

For long all this was submitted to in silence. A coarse jest from Vizcarra at length provoked reply. The reply alluded to the changed features of the latter, which so exasperated the brute, that he dashed, dagger in hand, upon the bound victim, and would have taken his life, but that Roblado and others held him back! He was only prevented from killing Carlos by his companions declaring that such a proceeding would rob them of their anticipated sport! This consideration alone restrained him; but he was not contented until with his fists he had inflicted several blows upon the face of the defenseless captive!

“Let the wretch live!” said Roblado. “To-morrow we shall have a fine spectacle for him!”

With this the inebriated gang staggered out, leaving the prisoner to reflect upon this promised “spectacle.”

He did reflect upon it. That he was to be made a spectacle he understood well enough. He had no hopes of mercy, either from civil or military judges. His death was to be the spectacle. All night long his soul was tortured with painful thoughts, not of himself, but about those far dearer to him than his own life.

Morning glanced through the narrow loophole of his gloomy cell. Nothing else—naught to eat, to drink—no word of consolation—no kind look from his ruffian jailers. No friend to make inquiry about him—no sign that a single heart on earth cared for him.

Midday arrived. He was taken, or rather dragged, from his prison. Troops formed around and carried him off. Where was he going? To execution?

His eyes were free. He saw himself taken to the town and through the plaza. There was an unusual concourse of people. The square was nearly filled, and the azoteas that commanded a view of it. All the inhabitants of the settlement seemed to be present in the town. There were hacendados, rancheros, miners and all. Why? Some grand event must have brought them together. They had the air of people who expected to witness an unusual scene. Perhaps the “spectacle” promised by Roblado! But what could that be? Did they intend to torture him in presence of the multitude? Such was not improbable.

The crowd jeered him as he passed. He was carried through their midst and thrust into the Calabozo.

A rude *banqueta* along one side of his cell offered a resting-place. On this the wretched man sunk down into a lying posture. The fastenings on his arms and legs would not allow him to sit upright.

He was left alone. The soldiers who had conducted him went out, turning the key behind them. Their voices and the clink of their scabbards told him that some of them still remained by the door. Two of them had been left there as sentinels. The others sauntered off, and mingled with the crowd of civilians that filled the plaza.

Carlos lay for some minutes without motion—almost without thought. His soul was overwhelmed with misery. For the first time in his life he felt himself yielding to despair.

The feeling was evanescent; and once more he began to reflect—not to hope—no! Hope, they say dies but with life; but that is a paradox. He still lived, but hope had died. Hope of escape there was none. He was too well guarded. His exasperated enemies, having experienced the difficulty of his capture, were not likely to leave him the slightest chance of escape. Hope of pardon—of mercy—it never entered his thoughts to entertain either.

But reflection returned. It is natural for a captive to glance around the walls of his prison—to assure himself that he is really a prisoner. It is his first act when the

bolt shoots from the lock, and he feels himself alone. Obedient to this impulse, the eye of Carlos was raised to the walls. His cell was not a dungeon—a small window, or embrasure, admitted light. It was high up, but Carlos saw that, by standing upon the *banqueta*, he could have looked out by it. He had no curiosity to do so, and he lay still. He saw that the walls of his prison were not of stone. They were *adobe* bricks, and the embrasure enabled him to tell their thickness. There was no great strength in them either. A determined man, with an edge-tool and time to spare, could make his way through them easily enough. So Carlos reflected; but he reflected, as well, that he had neither the edge-tool nor the time. He was certain that in a few hours—perhaps minutes—he would be led from that prison to the scaffold.

Oh! he feared not death—not even torture, which he anticipated would be his lot. His torture was the thought of eternal separation from mother, sister, from the proud noble girl he loved—the thought that he would never again behold them—one or other of them—this was the torture that maddened his soul.

Could he not communicate with them? Had he no friend to carry to them a last word?—to convey a dying thought? None!

The sunbeam that slanted across the cell was cut off at intervals, and the room darkened. Something half covered the embrasure without. It was the face of some idle lepero, who, curious to catch a glimpse of the captive, had caused himself to be hoisted upon the shoulders of his fellows. The embrasure was above the heads of the crowd. Carlos could hear their brutal jests, directed not only against himself, but against those dear to him—his mother and sister. While this pained him, he began to wonder that they should be so much the subject of the conversation. He could not tell what was said of them, but in the hum of voices their names repeatedly reached his ear.

He had lain about an hour on the *banqueta*, when the door opened, and the two officers, Vizcarra and Roblado, stepped within the cell. They were accompanied by Gomez.

The prisoner believed that his hour had come. They were going to lead him forth to execution. He was wrong. That was not their design. Far different. They had come to gloat over his misery.

Their visit was to be a short one.

"Now, my brave!" began Roblado. "We promised you a spectacle to-day. We are men of our word. We come to admonish you that it is prepared, and about to come off. Mount upon that *banqueta*, and look out into the plaza you will have an excellent view of it; and as it is near you will need no glass! Up then! and don't lose time. You will see what you will see. Ha! ha! ha!"

And the speaker broke into a hoarse laugh, in which the comandante as well as the sergeant joined; and then all three, without waiting for a reply, turned and went out, ordering the door to be locked behind them.

The visit, as well as Roblado's speech, astonished and puzzled Carlos. For some minutes he sat reflecting upon it. What could it mean? A *spectacle*, and he to be a *spectator*? What could it mean?

For a time he sat endeavoring to make out the sense of Roblado's words. For a good while he pondered over the speech, until at length he had found, or thought he had found, the key to its meaning.

"Ha!" muttered he; "Don Juan—it is he! My poor friend! They have condemned him, too; and he is to die before me. That is what I am called upon to witness. Fiends! I shall not gratify them by looking at it. No! I shall remain where I am."

He threw himself once more prostrate along the *banqueta*, determined to remain in that position. He muttered at intervals:

"Poor Don Juan!—a true friend—to death!—ay, even to death, for it is for me he dies—for me, and—oh! love—love—"

His reflections were brought to a sudden termination. The window was darkened by a face, and a rough voice called in:

"Hola! Carlos, you butcher of buffaloes! look forth! *Carajo!* here's a sight for you! Look at your old witch of a mother! What a figure she cuts! Ha! ha!"

The sting of a poisonous reptile—a blow from an enemy—could not have roused Carlos more rapidly from his prostrate attitude. As he sprang to an upright position, the fastenings upon his ankles were forgotten; and, after staggering half across the floor, he came down upon his knees.

A second effort was made with more caution, and this time he succeeded in keeping his feet. A few moments sufficed for him to work himself up to the *banqueta*; and, having mounted this, he applied his face to the embrasure and looked forth.

His eyes rested upon a scene that caused the blood to curdle in his veins, and started the sweat in bead drops over his forehead. A scene that filled his heart with horror, that caused him to feel as if some hand was clutching and compressing it between fingers of iron!

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE plaza was partially cleared—the open space guarded by lines of soldiers. The crowds, closely packed, stood along the sides of the houses, or filled the balconies and azoteas. The officers, alcalde, magistrates, and principal men of the town, were grouped near the center of the plaza. Most of these wore official costume, and under other circumstances, the eyes of the crowd would have been upon them. Not so now. There was a group more attractive than they—a group upon which every eye was gazing with intense interest.

This group occupied a corner of the plaza in front of the calabozo, directly in front of the window from which Carlos looked out. It was the first thing upon which his eyes rested. He saw no more—he saw not the crowd, nor the line of soldiers that penned it back—he saw not the gaudy gentry in the square; he saw only that group of beings before him. That was enough to keep his eyes from wandering.

The group was thus composed: There were two asses—small, shaggy brown animals—caparisoned in a covering of coarse black serge, that hung nearly to their feet. Each had a coarse hair halter held in the hand of a lepero driver, also fantastically dressed in the same black stuff. Behind each stood a lepero similarly attired, and carrying "cuartos" of buffaloeskin. By the side of each ass was one of the padres of the mission, and each of these held in his hand the implements of his trade—book, rosary, and crucifix. The priests wore an official look. They were in the act of officiating. At what? Listen!

The asses were mounted. On the back of each was a form—a human form. These sat not freely, but in constrained attitudes. The feet were drawn underneath by cords passed around the ankles, and to a sort of wooden yoke around the necks of the animals the hands of the riders were tied—so as to bring their backs into a slanting position. In this way their heads hung down, and their faces, turned to the wall, could not yet be seen by the crowd.

The eye needed but one glance at those forms to tell they were women! The long, loose hair—in the one gray, in the other golden—shrouding their cheeks, and hanging over the necks of the animals, was further proof of this. For one it was not needed. The outlines were those of a Venus. A sculptor's eye could not have detected a fault. In the form of the other, age had traced its marks. It was furrowed, angled, lean, and harsh to the eye of the observer.

Oh, God! what a sight for the eye of Carlos, the cibolero! Those involuntary riders *were* his mother and sister!

And just at that moment his eye rested upon them—ay, and recognized them at a glance.

An arrow passing through his heart could not have inflicted keener pain. A sharp, half-stifled scream escaped his lips—the only sign of suffering the ear might detect. He was silent from that moment. His hard quick breathing alone told that he lived. He did not faint or fall. He did not retreat from the window. He stood like a statue in the position he had first taken, hugging the wall with his breast, to steady himself. His eyes remained fixed on the group, and fixed, too, in their sockets, as if glued there!

Roblado and Vizcarra, in the center of the square, enjoyed their triumph. They saw him at the embrasure. He saw not them. He had for the moment forgotten that they existed.

At a signal the bell rung in the tower of the parroquia, and then ceased. This was the cue for commencing the horrid ceremony.

The black drivers led their animals from the wall, and, heading them in a direction parallel to one side of the plaza, stood still. The faces of the women were now turned partially to the crowd, but their disheveled hair sufficiently concealed them. The padres approached. Each selected one. They mumbled a few unintelligible phrases in the ears of their victims, flourished the crucifix before their faces, and then, retiring a step, muttered some directions to the two ruffians in the rear.

These with ready alacrity took up their cue, gathered the thick ends of their cuartos around their wrists, and plied the lash upon the naked backs of the women. The strokes were deliberate and measured—they were counted! Each seemed to leave its separate weal upon the skin. Upon the younger female they were more conspicuous—not that they had been delivered with greater severity, but upon the softer, whiter and more tender skin, the purple lines appeared plainer by contrast.

Strange that neither cried out. The girl writhed, and uttered a low whimpering, but no scream escaped her lips. As for the old woman, she remained quite motionless; no sign told that she suffered!

When ten lashes each had been administered, a voice from the center of the plaza cried out: "*Basta por la nina!*" (Enough for the girl.)

The crowd echoed this; and he whose office it was to flog the younger female rolled up his cuarto and desisted. The other went on until twenty-five lashes were told off.

A band of music now struck up. The asses

were led along the side of the square and halted at the next corner.

The music stopped. The padres again went through their numbing ceremony. The executioners performed their part—only one of them this time—as by the voice of the crowd the younger female was spared the lash, though she was still kept in her degraded and shameful position.

The full measure of twenty-five stripes was administered to the other, and then again the music, and the procession moved on to the third angle of the plaza.

Here the horrid torture was repeated, and again at the fourth and last corner of the square, where the hundred lashes—the full number decreed as the punishment—were completed.

The ceremony was over. The crowd gathered around the victims—who, now released from official keeping, were left to themselves.

The feeling of the crowd was curiosity, not sympathy. Notwithstanding all that had passed before their eyes, there was but little sympathy in the hearts of that rabble.

Fanaticism is stronger than pity; and who cared for the witch and the heretic?

Yes—there were some who cared yet. There were hands that unbound the cords and chafed the brows of the sufferers, and flung rebosos over their shoulders, and poured water into the lips of those silent victims—silent, for both had fainted!

A rude carreta was there. How it came there no one knew or cared. It was getting dusk, and people, having satisfied their curiosity, and hungry from long fasting, were falling off to their homes. The brawny driver of the carreta, directed by a young girl, and aided by two or three dusky Indians, lifted the sufferers into his vehicle, and then, mounting himself, drove off; while the young girl, and two or three who had assisted him, followed the vehicle.

It cleared the suburbs, and, striking into a by-road that traversed the chaparral, arrived at a lone rancho, the same where Rosita had been taken before—for it was Josefa who again carried her away.

The sufferers were taken inside the house. It was soon perceived that one no longer suffered. The daughter was restored to consciousness, only to see that that of her mother had forever fled!

Her temples were chafed—her lips moistened—her hand pressed in vain. The wild utterance of a daughter's grief fell unheard upon her ears. Death had carried her spirit to another world.

CHAPTER XXXV.

FROM the embrasure of his prison Carlos looked upon the terrible spectacle. We have said that he regarded it in silence. Not exactly so. Now and then, as the blood-stained lash fell heavier than usual, a low groan escaped him—the involuntary utterance of agony extreme.

His looks more than his voice betrayed the fearful fire that was burning within. Those who by chance or curiosity glanced into the embrasure were appalled by the expression of that face. Its muscles were rigid and swollen, the eyes were fixed and ringed with purple, the teeth firmly set, the lips drawn tight over them, and large sweat-drops glistened upon the forehead. No red showed upon the cheeks, nor any part of the face—not a trace to tell that blood circulated there. Pale as death was that face, and motionless as marble.

From his position Carlos could see but two angles of the plaza—that where the cruel scene had its commencement, and that where the second portion was administered. The procession then passed out of sight; but though his eyes were no longer tortured by the horrid spectacle, there was but little relief in that. He knew it continued all the same.

He remained no longer by the window. A resolve carried him from it—the resolve of self-destruction!

His agony was complete. He could endure it no longer. Death would relieve him, and upon death he was determined.

But how to die?

He had no weapon; and even if he had, pinioned as he was, he could not have used it.

But one mode seemed possible—to dash his head against the wall!

A glance at the soft mason-work of *adobes* convinced him that this would not effect his purpose. By such an effort he might stun, but not kill himself. He would wake again to horrid life.

His eyes swept the cell in search of some mode of self-destruction.

A beam traversed the apartment. It was high enough to hang the tallest man. With his hands free, and a cord in them, it would do. There was cord enough on them for the purpose, for they were bound by several varas of a raw-hide thong.

To the fastenings his attention was now directed; when, to his surprise and delight, he perceived that the thong had become slack and loose! The hot sweat, pouring from his hands

and wrists, had saturated the raw-hide, causing it to melt and yield; and his desperate exertions, made mechanically under the influence of agony and half-madness, had stretched it for inches! A slight examination of the fastenings convinced him of the possibility of his undoing them; and to this he applied himself with all the strength and energy of a desperate man. Had his hands been tied in front, he might have used his teeth in the endeavor to set them free; but they were bound fast together across his back. He pulled and wrenched them with all his strength.

If there is a people in the world who understand better than any other the use of ropes or thongs, that people is the Spanish-American. The Indian must yield to them in this knowledge, and even the habile sailor makes but a clumsy knot in comparison. No people so well understand how to bind a captive *without iron*, and the captive outlaw had been tied to perfection.

But neither ropes of hemp nor hide will secure a man of superior strength and resolution. Give such an one but time to operate, and he will be certain to free himself. Carlos knew that he needed but time.

The effect produced by the moistening of the raw hide was such, that short time sufficed. In less than ten minutes it slipped from his wrists, and his hands were free!

He drew the thong through his fingers to clear it of loops and snarls. He fashioned one end into a noose; and, mounting upon the banquetta, knotted the other over the beam. He then placed the noose around his naked throat—calculating the height at which it should hang when drawn taut by the weight of his body! and, placing himself on the elevated edge of the banquetta, he was prepared to spring out:

"Let me look on them once more before I die—poor victims!—once more!"

The position he occupied was nearly in front of the embrasure, and he had only to lean a little to one side to get a view of the plaza. He did so.

He could not see them; but he saw that the attention of the crowd was directed toward that angle of the square adjacent to the Calabozo. The horrid ceremony would soon be over. Perhaps they would then be carried within sight. He would wait for the moment, it would be his last—

"Ha! what is that? Oh God! it is—"

He heard the "weep" of the keen cuarto as it cut the air. He thought, or fancied, he heard a low moan. The silence of the crowd enabled him to distinguish the slightest sounds.

"God of mercy, is there no mercy? God of vengeance, hear me! Ha! vengeance! what am I dreaming of, suicidal fool? What! my hands free—can I not break the door? the lock? I can but die upon their weapons! and maybe—"

He had flung the noose from his neck, and was about to turn away from the window, when a heavy object struck him on the forehead, almost stunning him with the blow!

At first he thought it was a stone from the hand of some ruffian without; but the object, in falling upon the banquetta, gave out a dull metallic clink. He looked down, and in the dim light could make out that the thing which had struck him was of an oblong shape. He bent hastily forward, and clutched it.

It was a parcel, wrapped in a piece of silken scarf and tied securely. The string was soon unfastened, and the contents of the parcel held up to the light. These were a rouleau of gold onzas, a long-bladed knife, and a folded sheet of paper!

The last occupied his attention first. The sun was down, and the light declining, but in front of the window there was still enough to enable him to read. He opened the paper and read:

"Your time is fixed for to-morrow. I cannot learn whether you will be kept where you are all night, or be taken back to the Presidio. If you remain in the Calabozo, well. I send you two weapons. Use which you please, or both. The walls can be pierced. There will be one outside who will conduct you safe. Should you be taken to the Presidio, you must endeavor to escape on the way, or there is no hope. I need not recommend courage and resolution to you—the personification of both. Make for the rancho of Josefa. There you will find one who is now ready to share your perils and your liberty. Adieu! my soul's hero, adieu!"

No name appeared. But Carlos needed none—he well knew who was the writer of that note.

"Brave, noble girl!" he muttered as he concealed the paper under the breast of his hunting-shirt; "the thought of living for you fills me with fresh hope—gives me new nerve for the struggle. If I die, it will not be by the hands of the *garrotero*. No, my hands are free. They shall not be bound again while life remains. I shall yield only to death itself."

As the captive muttered these thoughts he sat down upon the banquetta, and hurriedly untied the thongs that up to this time had remained upon his ankles. This done, he rose to his feet again; and, with the long knife firmly clutched, strode up and down the cell, glancing fiercely toward the door at each turning. He had resolved to run the gantlet of his guards, and by

his manner it was evident he had made up his mind to attack the first of them that entered.

For several minutes he paced his cell, like a tiger within its cage.

At length a thought seemed to suggest itself that caused a change in his manner, sudden and decided. He gathered up the thongs just cast off; and seating himself upon the banquetta, once more wound them around his ankles—but this time in such a fashion, that a single jerk upon a cunningly-contrived knot would set all free. The knife was hidden under his hunting shirt, where the purse had been already deposited. Last of all, he unloosed the raw-hide rope from the beam, and, meeting his hands behind him, whipped it around both wrists, until they had the appearance of being securely spliced. He then assumed a reclining attitude along the banquetta, with his face turned toward the door, and remained motionless as though he were asleep!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

IN our land of cold impulses—of love calculating and interested—we cannot understand, and scarcely credit, the deeds of reckless daring that in other climes have their origin in that strong passion.

Among Spanish women love often attains a strength and sublimity utterly unfelt and unknown to nations who mix it up with their merchandise. With those highly-developed dames it often becomes a true passion—unselfish, headlong, intense—usurping the place of every other, and filling the measure of the soul. Filial affection—domestic ties—moral and social duty—must yield. Love triumphs over all.

Of such a nature—of such intensity—was the love that burned in the heart of Catalina de Cruces.

Filial affection had been weighed against it; rank, fortune, and many other considerations, had been thrown into the scale. Love outbalanced them all; and, obedient to its impulse, she had resolved to fling all the rest behind her.

It was nearing the hour of midnight, and the mansion of Don Ambrosio was dark and silent. Its master was not at home. A grand banquet had been provided at the Presidio by Vizcarra and Roblado, to which all the grandes of the settlement had been invited. Don Ambrosio was among the number. At this hour he was at the Presidio, feasting and making merry.

It was not a ladies' festival, therefore Catalina was not there. It was, indeed, rather an extemporized affair—a sort of jubilee to wind up the performance of the day. The officers and priests were in high spirits, and had put their heads together in getting up the improvised banquet.

The town had become silent, and the mansion of Don Ambrosio showed not a sign of life. The portero still lingered by the great gate, waiting his master's return; but he sat inside upon the banquetta of the zaguan, and seemed to be asleep.

He was watched by those who wished him to sleep on.

The large door of the *caballeriza* was open. Within the framework of the posts and lintels the form of the man could be distinguished. It was the groom Andres.

There was no light in the stable. Had there been so, four horses might have been seen standing in their stalls, saddled and bridled. A still stranger circumstance might have been observed—round the hoofs of each horse were wrapped pieces of coarse woolen cloth, that were drawn up and fastened around the ankles! There was some design in this.

The door of the *caballeriza* was not visible from the zaguan; but at intervals the figure within the stable came forth, and, skulking along, peeped around the angle of the wall. The portero was evidently the object of his scrutiny. Having listened a while, the figure again returned to its place in the dark doorway, and stood as before.

Up to a certain time a tiny ray of light could be detected stealing through the curtains of a chamber door—the chamber of the senorita. All at once the light silently disappeared; but a few moments after, the door opened noiselessly. A female figure glided softly forth, and turned along under the shadow of the wall, in the direction of the *caballeriza*. On reaching the open doorway she stopped, and called in a low voice:

"Andres!"

"*Aquí, senorita,*" answered the groom, stepping a little more into the light.

"All saddled?"

"Sí, senorita."

"You have muffled their hoofs?"

"Every one, senorita."

"Oh! what shall we do with *him*?" continued the lady in a tone of distress, and pointing toward the zaguan. "We shall not be able to pass out before papa returns, and then it may be too late. *Santisima!*"

"Senorita, why not serve the portero as I have done the girl? I'm strong enough for that."

"Oh, Vicenza! how have you secured her?"

"In the garden-house—tied, gagged, and

locked up. I warrant she'll not turn up till somebody finds her. No fear of her, senorita. I'll do the same for the portero, if you but say the word."

"No—no—no! who would open the gate for papa? No—no—no! it would not do." She reflected. "And yet, if he gets out before the horses are ready, they will soon miss—pursue—overtake him. He will get out, I am sure of it. How long would it occupy him? not long. He will easily undo his cord fastenings. I know that—he once said he could. Oh, holy Virgin! he may now be free, and waiting for me! I must haste—the portero—Ha!"

As she uttered this exclamation she turned suddenly to Andres. A new plan seemed to have suggested itself.

"Andres! good Andres! listen! We shall manage it yet!"

"Sí, senorita."

"Thus, then. Lead the horses out the back way, through the garden—can you swim them across the stream?"

"Nothing easier, my lady."

"Good! Through the garden take them then. Stay!"

At this she cast her eyes toward the entrance of the long alley leading to the garden, which was directly opposite to, and visible from, the zaguan. Unless the portero were asleep, he could not fail to see four horses passing out in that way—dark as was the night. Here, then, a new difficulty presented itself.

Suddenly starting, she seemed to have thought of a way to overcome it.

"Andres, it will do. You go to zaguan. See whether he be asleep. Go up boldly. If asleep well; if not enter into conversation with him. Get him to open the little door and let you out. Wile him upon the street, and by some means keep him there. I shall lead out the horses."

This was plausible, and the groom prepared himself for a strategic encounter with the portero.

"When sufficient time has elapsed, steal after me to the garden. See that you manage well, Andres. I shall double your reward. You go with me—you have nothing to fear."

"Senorita, I am ready to lay down my life for you."

Gold is powerful. Gold had won the stout Andres to a fealty stronger than friendship. For gold he was ready to strangle the portero on the spot.

The latter was not asleep—only dozing, as a Spanish portero knows how. Andres put the stratagem in practice, he offered a cigar; and in a few minutes' time his unsuspecting fellow-servant stepped with him through the gate, and both stood smoking outside.

Catalina judged their situation by the hum of their voices. She entered the dark stable; and gliding to the head of one of the horses, caught the bridle, and led the animal forth. A few moments sufficed to conduct it to the garden, where she knotted the reins to a tree.

She then returned for the second, and the third, and the fourth and last—all of which she secured as she had done the first.

Once more she went back to the patio. This time only to shut the stable-door, and lock that of her own chamber; and, having secured both, she cast a look toward the zaguan, and then glided back into the garden. Here she mounted her own horse, took the bridle of another in her hand, and sat waiting.

She had not long to wait. Andres had well calculated his time, for in a few minutes he appeared in the entrance; and, having closed the gate behind him, joined his mistress.

The *ruse* had succeeded admirably. The portero suspected nothing. Andres had bidden him "*buenas noches*," at the same time expressing his intention of going to bed.

Don Ambrosio might now return when he pleased. He would retire to his sleeping-room as was his wont. He would not know before morning the loss he had sustained.

The mufflings were now removed from the feet of the horses, and, plunging as silently as possible into the water, the four were guided across the stream. Having ascended the opposite bank, they were first headed toward the cliffs, but before they had proceeded far in that direction they turned into a path of the chaparral leading downward. This path would conduct them to the rancho of Josefa.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

FROM the position he occupied, Carlos did not fail to observe the outlines of his prison and search for that point that might be pierced with least trouble. He saw that the walls were of adobe bricks—strong enough to shut in an ordinary malefactor, but easily cut through by a man armed with the proper tool, and the determination to set himself free. Two hours work would suffice, but how to work that two hours without being interrupted and detected? That was the question that occupied the mind of the captive.

One thing was very evident; it would be unwise to commence operations before a late hour—until the relief of the guard.

Carlos had well calculated his measures. He had determined to remain as he was, and keep

up the counterfeit of his being fast bound until such time as the guard should be changed. He knew that it was the duty of the old guard to deliver him to the relief; and these would assure themselves of his being in the cell by ocular inspection. He guessed that the hour of guard-mounting must be near. He would, therefore, not have long to wait before the new sentries should present themselves in his cell.

One thought troubled him. Would they keep him in the Calabozo that night, or take him back to the Presidio for better security? If the latter, his only chance would be—as she had suggested—to make a desperate effort and escape on the route. Once lodged in the guard-house prison, he would be surprised by walls of stone. There would be no hope of cutting his way through them.

It was probable enough he should be taken there; and yet why should they fear his escape from the Calabozo—fast bound as they believed him—unarmed, guarded by vigilant sentinels? No. They would not dream of his getting off. Besides, it would be more convenient to keep him all night in the latter prison. It was close to the place of his intended execution, which no doubt was to take place on the morrow. The garrote had been already erected in front of his jail!

Partly influenced by such considerations, and partly that they were occupied with pleasanter matters, the authorities had resolved on leaving him where he was for the night, though Carlos was ignorant of this.

He had, however, prepared himself for either contingency. Should they convey him back to the Presidio, he would seek the best opportunity that offered and risk his life in a bold effort to escape. Should he be permitted to remain in the Calabozo, he would wait till the guard had visited him—then set to work upon the wall after they had gone out. In the event of being detected while at work, but one course remained—run the gantlet of the guard and cut his way through their midst.

His escape was not an affair of such improbability. A determined man with a long knife in his grasp—one who will yield only to death—is a difficult thing to secure under any circumstances. Such an one will often effect his freedom, even when hemmed in by a host of enemies. With Carlos, however, the probabilities of escape were much greater. He was individually strong and brave, while most of his enemies were physically but pigmies in comparison. As to their courage, he knew that once they saw him with his hands free and armed, they would make way for him on all sides. What he had most to fear was the bullets of their carbines; but he had much to hope from their want of skill, and the darkness would favor him.

For more than an hour he lay along the banquetta, turning over in his mind the chances of regaining his liberty. His reflections were interrupted by an unusual stir outside his prison. A fresh batch of soldiers had arrived at the door.

Carlos's heart beat anxiously. Was it a party come to conduct him to the Presidio? It might be so. He waited with painful impatience listening to every word.

To his great joy it proved to be the arrival of the relief-guard; and he had the satisfaction of hearing, by their conversation, that they had been detailed to guard him all night in the Calabozo. This was just the very thing he desired to know.

Presently the door was unlocked and opened and several of the men entered. One bore a lantern. With this they examined him—uttering coarse and insulting remarks as they stood around. They saw that he was securely bound. After awhile all went out and left him to himself. The door was of course relocked, and the cell was again in perfect darkness.

Carlos lay still for a few minutes, to assure himself that they were not going to return. He heard them place the sentries by the door, and then the voices of the greater number seemed borne off to some distance.

Now was the time to begin his work. He hastily cast the cords from his hands and feet, drew the long knife from his breast, and attacked the adobe wall.

The spot he had chosen was at the corner furthest from the door, and at the back side of the cell. He knew not what was the nature of the ground on the other side, but it seemed most likely that which would lie toward the open country. The Calabozo was no fortress-prison—a mere temporary affair, used by the municipal authorities for malefactors of the smaller kind. So much the better for his chances of breaking it.

The wall yielded easily to his knife. The adobe is but dry mud, toughened by an admixture of grass; and although the bricks were laid to the thickness of twenty inches or more, in the space of an hour succeeded in cutting a hole large enough to pass through. He could have accomplished this feat in still shorter time, but he was compelled to work with caution and as silently as possible. Twice he fancied that his guards were about to enter the cell, and both times he had sprung to his feet, and stood,

knife in hand, ready to assail them. Fortunately his fancies were without foundation. No one entered until the hole was made, and the captive had the satisfaction to feel the cold air rushing through the aperture.

He stopped his work and listened. There was no sound on that side of the prison. All was silence and darkness. He pressed his head forward, and peered through. The night was dark, but he could see weeds and cactus plants growing close to the wall. Good! There were no signs of life there.

He widened the aperture to the size of his body, and crawled through, knife in hand. He raised himself gradually and silently. Nothing but tall, rank weeds, cactus plants, and aloes. He was behind the range of the dwellings. He was in the common. He was free!

He started toward the open country, skulking under the shadow of the brushwood. A form rose before him, as if out of the earth, and a voice softly pronounced his name. He recognized the girl Josefa. A word or two was exchanged, when the girl beckoned him to follow, and silently led the way.

They entered the chaparral, and following a narrow path, succeeded in getting round the village. On the other side of the rancho, and in half an hour's time they arrived at and entered the humble dwelling.

In the next moment Carlos was bending over the corpse of his mother!

There was no shock in this encounter. He had been half prepared for such an event. Besides, his nerves had been already strained to their utmost by the spectacle of the morning. Sorrow may sometimes eclipse sorrow, and drive it from the heart; but that agony which he had already endured could not be supplanted by a greater. The nerve of grief had been touched with such severity that it could vibrate no longer!

Beside him was one who offered consolation—she, his noble preserver.

But it was no hour for idle grief. Carlos kissed the cold lips—hastily embraced his weeping sister—his love.

"The horses?" he inquired.

"They are close at hand—among the trees."

"Come, then! we must not lose a moment—we must go hence. Come!"

As he uttered these words, he wrapped the serape around the corpse, lifted it in his arms, and passed out of the rancho.

The others had already preceded him to the spot where the horses were concealed.

Carlos saw that there were five of these animals. A gleam of joy shot from his eyes as he recognized his noble steed. Antonio had recovered him. Antonio was there, on the spot.

All were soon in the saddles. Two of the horses carried Rosita and Catalina; the other two were ridden by Antonio and the groom Andres. The cibolero himself, carrying his strange burden, once more sprung upon the back of his faithful steed.

"Down the valley, master?" inquired Antonio.

Carlos hesitated a moment, as if deliberating.

"No," replied he, at length. "They would follow us that way. By the pass of La Nina. They will not suspect us of taking the cliff road. Lead on, Antonio!—the chaparral path—you know it best. On!"

The cavalcade started, and in a few minutes had passed the borders of the town, and was winding its way through the devious path that led to the pass of La Nina. No words were exchanged, or only a whisper, as the horses in single file followed one another through the chaparral.

An hour's silent travel brought them to the pass, up which they filed without halting till they had reached the top of the ravine. Here Carlos rode to the front, and, directing Antonio to guide the others straight across the tableland, remained himself behind.

As soon as the rest were gone past, he wheeled his horse, and rode direct for the cliff of La Nina. Having reached the extremity of the bluff, he halted at a point that commanded a full view of San Ildefonso. In the somber darkness of night the valley seemed but the vast crater of an extinct volcano; and the lights, glittering in the town and the Presidio, resembled the last sparks of flaming lava that had not yet died out!

The horse stood still. The rider raised the corpse upon his arm; and, baring the pale face, turned it in the direction of the lights.

"Mother! mother!" he broke forth, in a voice hoarse with grief. "Oh! that those eyes could see—that those ears could hear!—if but for a moment—one short moment—that you might bear witness to my vow! Here do I swear that you shall be revenged! From this hour I yield up my strength, my time, my soul and body, to the accomplishment of vengeance. Vengeance! why do I use the word? It is not vengeance, but justice—justice upon the perpetrators of the foulest murder the world has ever recorded. But it shall not go unpunished. Spirit of my mother, hear me! *It shall not.* Your death shall be avenged—your torture shall have full retribution. Rejoice, you ruffian

crew! feast, and be merry, for your time of sorrow will soon come—sooner than you think for! I go, but to return. Have patience—you shall see me again. Yes! once more you shall stand face to face with Carlos the cibolero!"

He raised his right arm, and held it outstretched in a menacing attitude, while a gleam of vengeful triumph passed over his countenance. His horse, as if actuated by a similar impulse, neighed wildly; and then wheeling round at a signal from his rider, galloped away from the cliff!

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AFTER having witnessed the disgusting ceremony in the plaza, the officers returned to their quarters at the Presidio.

As already stated, they did not return alone. The principal men of the place had been invited to dine with them—cura, padres, alcalde, and all. The capture of the outlaw was a theme of public gratulation and rejoicing; and the comandante and his captain—to whom was due the credit—were determined to rejoice. To that end the banquet was spread at the Presidio.

It was not thought worth while to remove Carlos to the soldiers' prison. He could remain all night in the Calabozo. Fast bound and well guarded as he was, there was not the slightest danger of him making his escape.

To-morrow would be the last day of his life. To-morrow his foes should have the pleasure of seeing him die. To-morrow the comandante and Roblado would enjoy their full measure of vengeance.

Even that day Vizcarra had enjoyed part of his. For the scorn with which he had been treated he had revenged himself, though it was he who from the center of the plaza had cried, "*Basta!*" It was not mercy that had caused him to interfere. His words were not prompted by motives of humanity—far otherwise.

His designs were vile and brutal. To-morrow the brother would be put out of the way, and then—

The wine, the music, the jest, the loud laugh—all could not drown some bitter reflections. Ever and anon the mirror upon the wall threw back his dark face spoiled and distorted. His success had been dearly purchased—his was a sorry triumph.

It prospered better with Roblado. Don Ambrosio was one of his guests, and sat beside him.

The wine had loosened the heart-strings of the miner. He was communicative and liberal of his promises. His daughter, he said, had repented of her folly, and now looked with indifference upon the fate of Carlos. Roblado might hope.

It is probable that Don Ambrosio had reasons for believing what he said. It is probable that Catalina had thrown out such hints, the better to conceal her desperate design.

The wine flowed freely, and the guests of the comandante reveled under its influence. There were toasts, and songs, and patriotic speeches; and the hour of midnight arrived before the company was half satiated with enjoyment.

In the midst of their carousal a proposal was volunteered by some one that the outlaw Carlos should be brought in! Odd as was this proposition, it exactly suited the half-drunken revelers. Many were curious to have a good sight of the cibolero, now so celebrated a personage.

The proposal was backed by many voices, and the comandante pressed to yield to it.

Vizcarra had no objection to gratify his guests. Both he and Roblado rather liked the idea. It would be a further humiliation of their hated enemy.

Enough. Sergeant Gomez was summoned, the cibolero sent for, and the revelry went on.

But that revelry was soon after brought to a sudden termination, when Sergeant Gomez burst into the saloon, and announced in a loud voice that—

The prisoner had escaped!

A shell dropping into the midst of that company could not have scattered it more completely. All sprung to their feet; chairs and tables went tumbling over; glasses and bottles were dashed to the floor; and the utmost confusion ensued.

The guests soon cleared themselves of the room. Some ran direct to their houses to see if their families were safe, while others made their way to the Calabozo to assure themselves of the truth of the sergeant's report.

Vizcarra and Roblado were in a state bordering upon madness. Both stormed and swore, at the same time ordering the whole garrison under arms.

In a few minutes nearly every soldier of the Presidio had vaulted to his saddle, and was galloping in the direction of the town.

The Calabozo was surrounded.

There was the hole through which the captive had got off. How had he unbound his fastenings—who had furnished him with the knife?

The sentries were questioned and flogged—and flogged and questioned—but could tell nothing. They knew not that their prisoner was gone, until Gomez and his party came to demand him!

Scouring parties were sent out in every direction—but in the night what could they do? The houses were all searched, but what was the use of that? The cibolero was not likely to have remained within the town. No doubt he was off once more to the plains!

The night search proved ineffectual; and in the morning the party that had gone down the valley returned, having found no traces either of Carlos, his sister, or his mother. It was known that the *hechicera* had died on the previous night, but where had the body been taken to? Had she come to life again, and aided the outlaw in his escape? Such was the conjecture!

At a later hour in the morning some light was thrown on the mysterious affair. Don Ambrosio, who had gone to rest without disturbing his daughter, was awaiting her presence in the breakfast room. What detained her beyond the usual hour? The father grew impatient—then anxious. A messenger was at length sent to summon her—no reply to the knocking at her chamber-door!

The door was burst open. The room was entered—it was found untenanted—the bed unpressed—the *senorita* had fled!

She must be pursued! Where is the groom?—the horses? She must be overtaken and brought back!

The stable is reached, and its door laid open. No groom! no horse!—they, too, were gone!

Heavens! what a fearful scandal! The daughter of Don Ambrosio had not only assisted the outlaw to escape, but she had shared his flight, and was now with him. "*Huyeron!*" was the universal cry.

The trail of the horses was at length taken up, and followed by a large party, both of dragoons and mounted civilians. It led into the high plain, and then toward the Pecos, where they had crossed. Upon the other side the trail was lost. The horses had separated, and gone in different directions, and their tracks, passing over dry shingle, could no longer be followed.

After several days' fruitless wandering, the pursuing party returned, and a fresh one started out; but this, after a while, came back to announce a similar want of success. Every haunt had been searched; the old rancho—the groves on the Pecos—even the ravine and its cave had been visited, and examined carefully. No traces of the fugitives could be discovered; and it was conjectured that they had gone clear off from the confines of the settlement.

This conjecture proved correct, and guessing was at length set at work. A party of friendly Comanches, who visited the settlement, brought in the report that they had met the cibolero on their way across the Llano Estacado—that he was accompanied by two women and several men with pack-mules carrying provisions—that he had told them (the Indians) he was on his way for a long journey—in fact, to the other side of the Great Plains.

This information was definite, and no doubt correct. Carlos had been often heard to express his intention of crossing over to the country of the Americanos. He was now gone thither—most likely to settle upon the banks of the Mississippi. He was already far beyond the reach of pursuit. They would see him no more—as it was not likely he would ever again show his face in the settlements of New Mexico.

Months rolled past. Beyond the report of the Comanches, nothing was heard of Carlos or his people. Although neither he nor his were forgotten, yet they had ceased to be generally talked of. Other affairs occupied the minds of the people of San Ildefonso; and there had lately arisen one or two matters of high interest—almost sufficient to eclipse the memory of the noted outlaw.

The settlement had been threatened by an invasion from the Yutas—which would have taken place, had not the Yutas, just at the time, been themselves attacked and beaten by another tribe of savages! This defeat had prevented their invasion of the valley—at least for that season, but they had excited fears for the future.

Another terror had stirred San Ildefonso of late—a threatened revolt of the Tagnos, the *Indios mansos*, or tame Indians, who formed the majority of the population. Their brethren in several other settlements had risen, and succeeded in casting off the Spanish yoke.

It was natural that those of San Ildefonso should dream of similar action, and conspire.

But their conspiracy was nipped in the bud by the vigilance of the authorities. The leaders were arrested, tried, condemned, and shot. Their scalps were hung over the gateway of the Presidio, as a warning to their dusky compatriots, who were thus reduced to complete submission.

These tragic occurrences had done much to obliterate from the memory of all the cibolero and his deeds. True, there were some of San Ildefonso who, with good cause, still remembered both; but the crowd had ceased to think of either him or his. All had heard and believed that the outlaw had long ago crossed the Great Plains, and was now safe under the pro-

tection of those of his own race, upon the banks of the Mississippi.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

AND what had become of Carlos? Was it true that he had crossed the great plains? Did he never return? What became of San Ildefonso?

These questions were asked, because he who narrated the legend had remained for some time silent. His eyes wandered over the valley, now raised to the cliff of La Nina, and now resting upon the weed-covered ruin. Strong emotion was the cause of his silence.

His auditory, already half guessing the fate of San Ildefonso, impatiently desired to know the end. After a while he continued.

Carlos *did* return. What became of San Ildefonso? In yonder ruin you have your answer. San Ildefonso fell. But you would know how? Oh! it is a terrible tale—a tale of blood and vengeance, and Carlos was the avenger.

Yes—the cibolero returned to the valley of San Ildefonso, but he came not alone. Five hundred warriors were at his back—red warriors who acknowledged him as their leader—their "White Chief." They were the braves of the Waco band. They knew the story of his wrongs, and had sworn to avenge him!

It was autumn—late autumn—that loveliest season of the American year, when the wild woods appear painted, and Nature seems to repose after her annual toil—when all her creatures, having feasted at the full banquet she has so lavishly laid out for them, appear content and happy.

It was night, with an autumnal moon—that moon whose round orb and silvery beams have been celebrated in the songs of many a harvest land.

Not less brilliant fell those beams where no harvest was ever known—upon the wild plain of the Llano Estacado. The lone *hatero*, couched beside his silent flock, was awakened by a growl from his watchful sheep-dog. Raising himself, he looked cautiously around. Was it the wolf, the grizzly bear, or the red puma? None of these. A far different object was before his eyes, as he glanced over the level plain—an object whose presence caused him to tremble.

A long line of dark forms was moving across the plain. They were the forms of horses with their riders. They were in single file—the muzzle of each horse close to the croup of the one that preceded him. From east to west they moved. The head of the line was already near, but its rear extended beyond the reach of the *hatero's* vision.

Presently the troop filed before him, and passed within two hundred paces of where he lay. Smoothly and silently it glided on. There was no chinking of bits, no jingling of spurs, no clanking of sabers. Alone could be heard the dull stroke of the shoeless hoof, or at intervals the neigh of an impatient steed, suddenly checked by a reproof from his rider. Silently they passed on—silent as specters. The full moon gleaming upon them added to their unearthly appearance.

The watcher trembled where he lay—though he knew they were not specters. He knew well what they were, and understood the meaning of that extended deployment. They were Indian warriors upon the march. The bright moonlight enabled him to distinguish further. He saw that they were all full-grown men—that they were nude to the waist, and below the thighs—that their breasts and arms were painted—that they carried naught but their bows, quivers, and spears—in short, that they were braves on the war-trail!

Strangest sight of all to the eyes of the *hatero* was the leader who rode at the head of that silent band. He differed from all the rest in dress, in equipments, in the color of his skin. *The hatero saw that he was white!*

Surprised was he at first on observing this, but not for long. This shepherd was one of the sharpest of his tribe. It was he who had discovered the remains of the yellow hunter and his companion. He remembered the events of that time. He reflected; and in a few moments arrived at the conclusion that the *White Chief* he now saw could be no other than Carlos, the cibolero! In that conjecture he was right.

The first thought of the *hatero* had been to save his own life by remaining quiet. Before the line of warriors had quite passed him, other thoughts came into his mind. The Indians were on the war-trail!—they were marching direct for the settlement—they were headed by Carlos the cibolero!

The history of Carlos the outlaw now came before his mind—he remembered the whole story; beyond a doubt the cibolero was returning to the settlement to take vengeance upon his enemies!

Influenced partly by patriotism, and partly by the hope of reward, the *hatero* at once resolved to defeat this purpose. He would hasten to the valley and warn the garrison.

As soon as the line had filed past he rose to his feet, and was about to start off upon his errand; but he had miscalculated the intelli-

gence of the white leader. Long before, the flanking scouts had inclosed both him and his charge, and the next moment he was a captive. Part of his flock served for the supper of that band he would have betrayed.

Up to the point where the *hatero* had been encountered, the White Chief and his followers had traveled along a well-known path—the trail of the traders. Beyond this, the leader swerved from the track; and without a word headed obliquely over the the plain. The extended line followed silently after—as the body of a snake moves after its head.

Another hour, and they had arrived at the *ceja* of the Great Plain—at a point well known to their chief. It was at the head of that ravine where he had so oft found shelter from his foes. The moon, though shining with splendid brilliance, was low in the sky, and her light did not penetrate the vast chasm. It lay buried in dark shade. The descent was a difficult one, though not to such men, and with such a guide.

Muttering some words to his immediate follower, the White Chief headed his horse into the cleft, and the next moment disappeared under the shadow of the rocks.

The warrior that followed, passing the word behind him, rode after, and likewise disappeared in the darkness; then another, and another, until five hundred mounted men were engulfed in that fearful-looking abyss. Not one remained upon the upper plain.

For a while there struck upon the ear a continued pattering sound—the sound of a thousand hoofs as they fell upon the rocks and loose shingle. But this noise gradually died away, and all was silence. Neither horses nor men gave any token of their presence in the ravine. The only sounds that fell upon the ears were the voices of nature's wild creatures whose haunts had been invaded. They were the wail of the goatsucker, the bay of the barking wolf, and the maniac scream of the eagle.

Another day passes—another moon has arisen—and the gigantic serpent, that had all day lain coiled in the ravine, is seen gliding silently out at its bottom, and stretching its long vertebrate form across the plain of the Pecos.

The stream is reached and crossed; amidst splashing spray, horse follows horse over the shallow ford; and then the glittering line glides on.

Having passed the river lowlands, it ascends the high plains that overlook the valley of San Ildefonso.

Here a halt is made—scouts are sent forward—and once more the line moves on.

Its head reaches the cliff of La Nina just as the moon has sunk behind the snowy summit of the Sierra Blanca. For the last hour the leader has been marching slowly, as though he waited her going down. Her light is no longer desired. Darkness better befits the deed that is to be done.

A halt is made until the pass has been reconnoitered. That done, the White Chief guides his followers down the defile; and in another half-hour the five hundred horsemen have silently disappeared within the mazes of the chaparral!

Under the guidance of the half-blood Antonio, an open glade is found near the center of the thicket. Here the horsemen dismount and tie their horses to the trees. The attack is to be made on foot.

It is now the hour after midnight. The moon has been down for some time; and the cirrus clouds, that for a while had reflected her light, have been gradually growing darker. Objects can no longer be distinguished at the distance of twenty feet. The huge pile of the Presidio, looming against the leaden sky, looks black and gloomy. The sentinel cannot be seen upon the turrets, but at intervals his shrill voice uttering the "*Centinela alerta!*" tells that he is at his post. His call is answered by the sentinel at the gate below, and then all is silent. The garrison sleeps secure—even the night-guard in the zaguan with their bodies extended along the stone banquetta, are sleeping soundly.

The Presidio dreads no sudden attack—there has been no rumor of Indian incursion—the neighboring tribes are all *en paz*; and the Tagno conspirators have been destroyed. Greater vigilance would be superfluous. A sentry upon the azotea, and another by the gate, are deemed sufficient for the ordinary guardianship of the garrison. Ha! the inmates of the Presidio little dream of the enemy that is nigh.

"*Centinela alerta!*" once more screams the watcher upon the wall. "*Centinela alerta!*" answers the other by the gate.

But neither is sufficiently on the alert to perceive the dark forms that, prostrate upon the ground like huge lizards, are crawling forward to the very walls. Slowly and silently these forms are moving, amidst weeds and grass, gradually drawing nearer to the gateway of the Presidio.

A lantern burns by the sentinel. Its light, radiating to some distance, does not avail him—he sees them not!

A rustling noise at length reaches his ear.

The "quien viva?" is upon his lips; but he lives not to utter the words. Half a dozen bow-strings twang simultaneously, and as many arrows bury themselves in his flesh. His heart is pierced, and he falls almost without uttering a groan.

A stream of dark forms pours into the open gateway. The guard, but half awake, perish before they can lay hand upon their weapons!

And now the war cry of the Wacoos peals out in earnest, and the hundreds of dark warriors rush like a torrent through the zagnan.

They enter the patio. The doors of the *cuartos* are besieged—soldiers, terrified to confusion, come forth in their shirts, and fall under the spears of their dusky assailants. Carbines and pistols crack on all sides, but those who fire do not live to reload them.

It was a short but terrible struggle—terrible while it lasted. There were shouts, and shots, and groans, mingling together—the deep voice of the vengeful leader, and the wild war-cry of his followers—the crashing of timber, as doors were broken through or forced from their hinges—the clashing of swords and spears, and the quick detonation of firearms. Oh! it was a terrible conflict!

It ends at length. An almost total silence follows. The warriors no longer utter their dread cry. Their soldier-enemies are destroyed. Every *cuarto* has been cleared of its inmates, who lie in bleeding heaps over the patio and by the doors. No quarter has been given. All have been killed on the spot.

No—not all. There are two who survive—two whose lives have been spared. Vizcarra and Roblado yet live!

Piles of wood are now heaped against the timber posterns of the building, and set on fire. Volumes of smoke roll to the sky, mingling with sheets of red flame. The huge pine beams of the azotea catch the blaze, burn, crackle, and fall inward, and in a short while the Presidio becomes a mass of smoking ruins!

But the red warriors have not waited for this. The revenge of their leader is not yet complete. It is not to the soldiers alone that he owes vengeance. He has sworn it to the citizens as well. The whole settlement is to be destroyed!

And well this oath was kept, for before the sun rose San Ildefonso was in flames. The arrow, and the spear, and the tomahawk, did their work; and men, women and children perished in hundreds under the blazing roofs of their houses!

With the exception of the Tagno Indians, few survived to tell of that massacre. A few whites only—the unhappy father of Catalina among the rest—were permitted to escape and carry their broken fortunes to another settlement.

That of San Ildefonso—town, Presidio, mission, haciendas and ranchos—in the short space of twelve hours had ceased to exist. The dwellers of that lovely valley were no more!

I have arrived at the last act of this terrible drama. The scene is La Nina—the top of the cliff—the same spot where Carlos had performed his splendid feat on the day of San Juan.

Another feat of horsemanship is now to be exhibited. How different the actors—how different the spectators!

Upon the tongue that juts out two men are seated upon horseback. They are not free riders, for it may be noticed that they are tied upon their seats. Their hands do not grasp a bridle, but are bound behind their backs; and their feet, drawn together under the bellies of their horses, are there spliced with raw-hide ropes. To prevent turning in the saddle, other thongs, extending from strong leathern waist-belts, stay them to croup and pommel, and hold their bodies firm. Under such a ligature no horse could dismount either without also flinging the saddle, and that is guarded against by the strongest girthing. It is not intended that these horsemen shall lose their seats until they have performed an extraordinary feat.

It is no voluntary act. Their countenances plainly tell that. Upon the features of both are written the most terrible emotions—craven cowardice in all its misery—despair in its darkest shadows!

Both are men of nearly middle age—both are officers in full uniform. But it needs not that to recognize them as the deadly enemies of Carlos—Vizcarra and Roblado. No longer now his enemies. They are his captives!

But for what purpose are they thus mounted? What scene of mockery is to be enacted? Scene of mockery! Ha! ha! ha!

Observe! the horses upon which they sit are wild mustangs! Observe! they are blinded with tapajos!

For what purpose? You shall see.

A Tagno stands at the head of each horse, and holds him with difficulty. The animals are kept fronting the cliff, with their heads directed to the jutting point of La Nina.

The Indians are drawn up in line also facing to the cliff. There is no noise in their ranks. An ominous silence characterizes the scene. In front is their chief mounted upon his coal-black

steed; and upon him the eyes of all are fixed, as though they expected some signal. His face is pale, but its expression is stern and immobile. He has not yet reached the completion of his vengeance.

There are no words between him and his victims. All that has passed. They know their doom.

Their backs are toward him, and they see him not; but the Tagnos who stand by the horses' heads have their eyes fixed upon him with a singular expression. What do these expect? A signal.

In awful silence was that signal given. To the right and left sprung the Tagnos, leaving free the heads of the mustangs. Another signal to the line of mounted warriors, who, on receiving it, spurred their horses forward with a wild yell.

Their spears soon pricked the hips of the mustangs, and the blinded animals sprung toward the cliff!

The groans of agonized terror that escaped from their riders were drowned by the yells of the pursuing horsemen.

In a moment all was over. The terrified mustangs had sprung from the cliff—had carried their riders into eternity!

The dusky warriors pulled up near the brink and sat gazing upon each other in silent awe.

A horseman dashed to the front, and poising his horse upon the very edge, looked down into the abyss. It was the White Chief.

For some moments he regarded the shapeless masses that lay below. He saw that they moved not. Men and horses were all dead. Crushed, bruised and shattered—a hideous sight to behold!

A deep sigh escaped him, as though some weight had been lifted from his heart, and turning around he muttered to his friend—

"Don Juan! I have kept my oath—she is avenged!"

The setting sun saw that long line of Indian warriors filing from the valley, and heading for the plain of the Llano Estacado. But they went not as they had come. They returned to their country laden with the plunder of San Ildefonso—to them the legitimate spoils of war.

The cibolero still rode at the head, and Don Juan the ranchero was by his side. The fearful scenes through which they had just passed shadowed the brows of both; but these shadows became lighter as they dwelt on the prospect before them. Each looked forward to a happy greeting at the end of his journey.

Carlos did not remain long among his Indian friends. Loaded with the treasure they had promised, he proceeded further east, and established a plantation upon the Red River of Louisiana. Here, in the company of his beautiful wife, his sister, Don Juan, and some of his old servants, he led in after years a life of peace and prosperity.

Now and then he made hunting excursions into the country of his old friends the Wacoos—who were ever glad to see him again, and still hailed him as their chief.

Of San Ildefonso there is no more heard since that time. No settlement was ever after made in that beautiful valley. The Tagnos—released from the bondage which the padres had woven around them—were but too glad to give up the half-civilization they had been taught. Some of them sought other settlements, but most returned to their old habits, and once more became hunters on the plains.

Perhaps the fate of San Ildefonso might have attracted more attention in other times; but it occurred at a peculiar period in Spanish-American history. Just then the Spanish power, all over the American continent, was hastening to its decline; and the fall of San Ildefonso was but one episode among many of a character equally dramatic. Near the same time fell Gran Quivira, Abo, Chilili, and hundreds of other settlements of note. Each has its story—each its red romance—perhaps far more interesting than that we have here recorded.

Chance alone guided our steps to the fair valley of San Ildefonso—chance threw in our way one who remembered its legend—the legend of the *White Chief*.

THE END.

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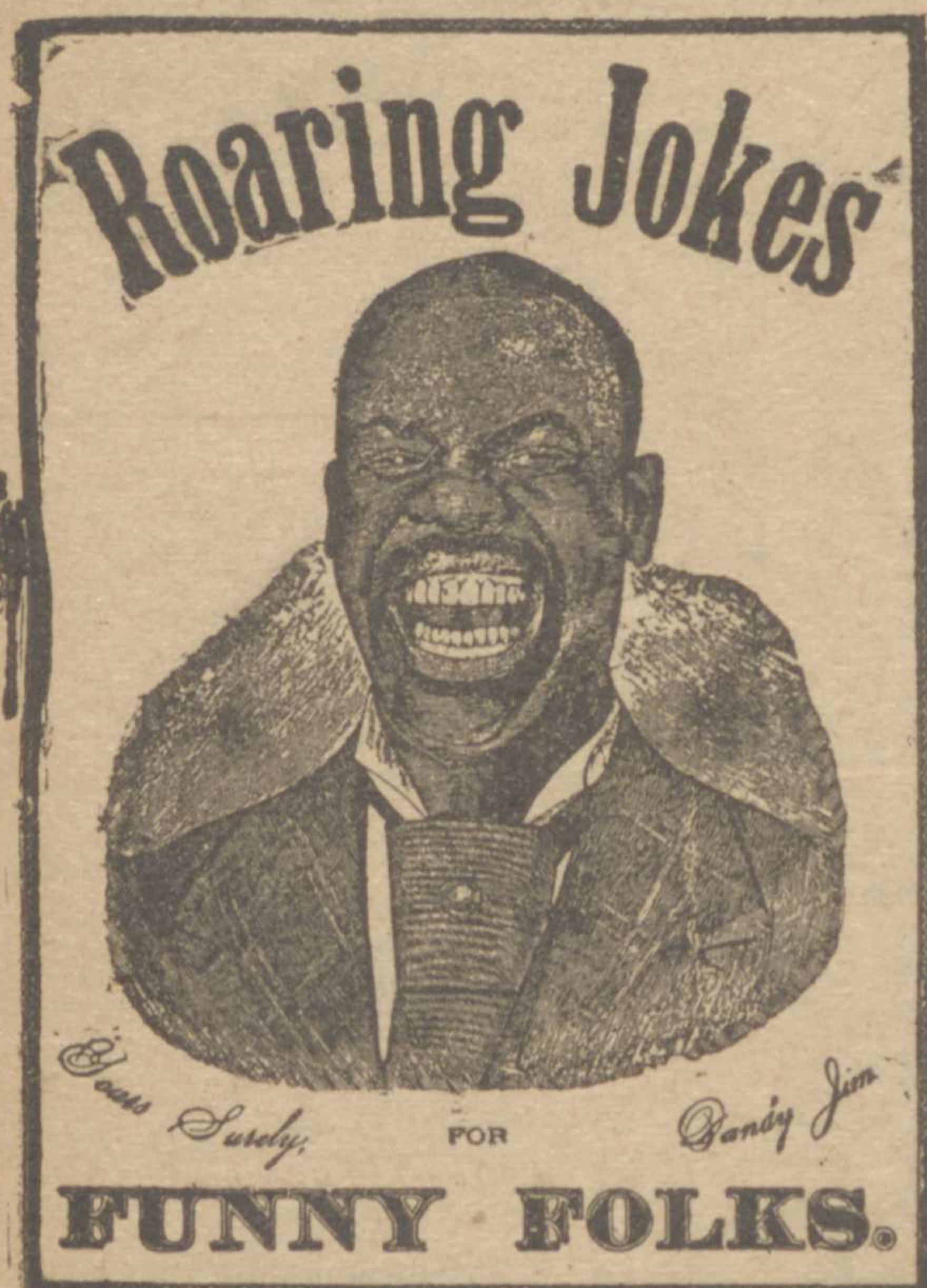
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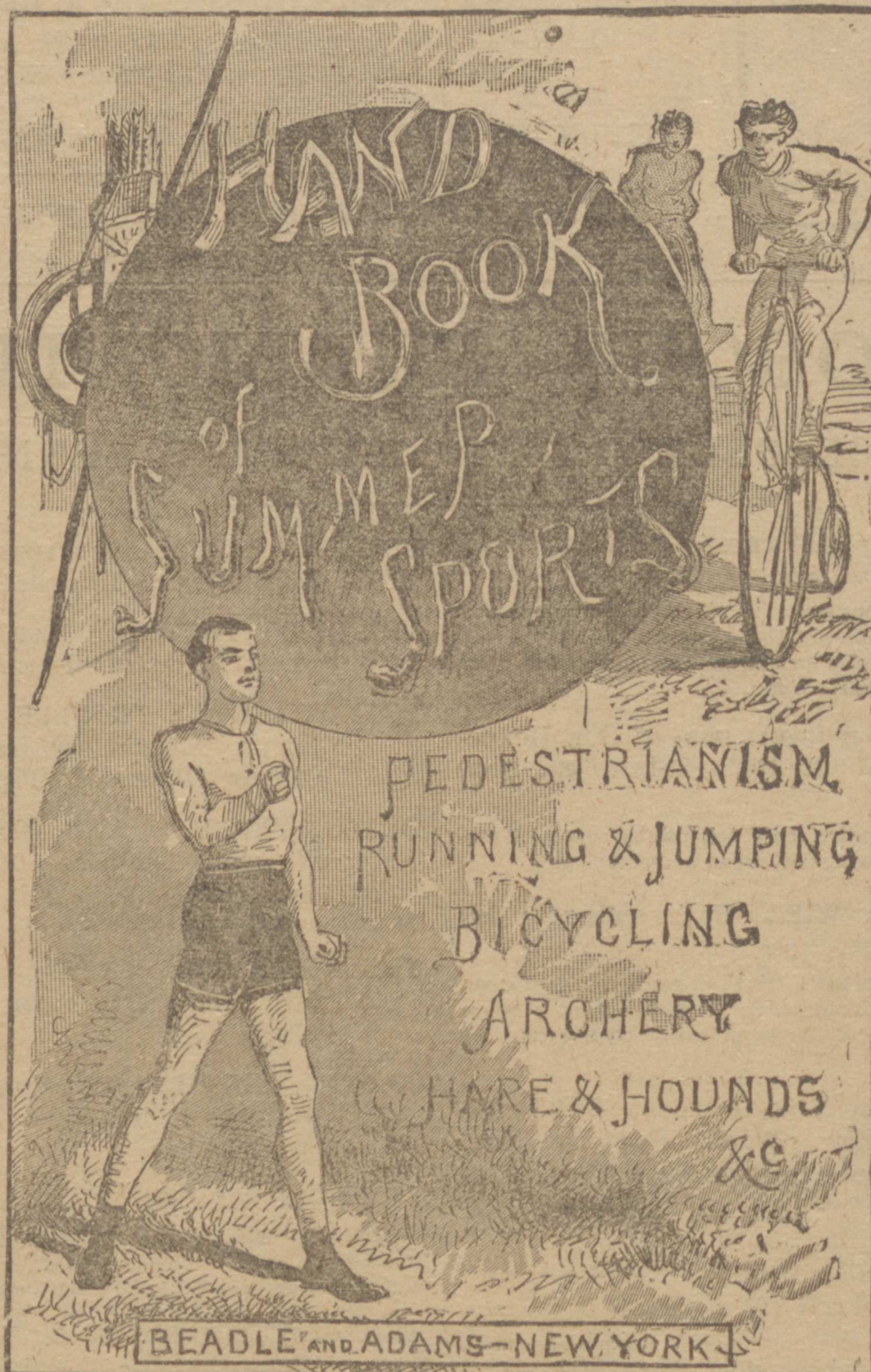
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